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ALL-OF-A-SUDDEN PEGGY



ALL - OF - A - SUDDEN PEGGY

A Light Comedy in Three Acts

By

ERNEST DENNY

Author of "Man Proposes," etc., etc.

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Any costumes or wigs required in the performance of "All-of-a-Sudden-Peggy" may be hired or purchased reasonably from Messrs. C. H. Fox, Ltd., 27, Wellington Street, Strand, London.

Arrangements for scenery can also be made with this firm.

Originally produced at the Duke of York's Theatre, London, on Tuesday, February 27, 1906; and afterwards at the Bijou Theatre, New York, on Monday, February 11, 1907.

The following is a copy of the first night's programme :—

On Tuesday Evening, February 27, at 8.30 o'clock, Charles Frohman will present "ALL-OF-A-SUDDEN PEGGY," a Comedy in Three Acts. By Ernest Denny.

ANTHONY, LORD CRACKENTHORPE . . . *Mr. Eric Lewis.*
(Fellow of the Entomological Society)
THE HON. JIMMY KEPPEL *Mr. Gerald du Maurier.*
(his Brother)
MAJOR ARCHIE PHIPPS (*retired*) . . . *Mr. Alfred Bishop.*
(Lady Crackenthorpe's Brother)
JACK MENZIES *Mr. Charles Bryant.*
PARKER *Mr. Clayton Greene.*
(Footman at Hawkhurst)
LUCAS *Mr. Richard Haigh.*
(Manservant at Jimmy's Flat)
LADY CRACKENTHORPE *Miss Kate Serjeantson.*
(Lord Crackenthorpe's Mother)
THE HON. MILLICENT KEPPEL . . . *Miss Beatrice Beckley.*
THE HON. MRS. COLQUHOUN . . . *Miss Ethel Matthews.*
MRS. O'MARA *Miss Florence Wood.*
(Widow of Professor O'Mara, F.R.S.)
and
PEGGY MISS MARIE TEMPEST.
(her Daughter)

ACT I. "THE SUDDENNESS OF PEGGY."
The White Hall at Hawkhurst, Lord Crackenthorpe's Country House.

ACT II. "THE SUDDENNESS OF CONSEQUENCES."
At Jimmy Keppel's Flat in London, a week later.

ACT III. "THE CONSEQUENCES OF SUDDENNESS."
The White Hall at Hawkhurst, on the evening of the same day.

The original cast of the American production of the play at the Bijou Theatre, New York, on Monday, February 11, 1907, was as follows:—

| | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ANTHONY, LORD CRACKENTHORPE | <i>Ernest Stallard.</i> |
| THE HON. JIMMY KEPPEL | <i>Frank Gilmore.</i> |
| JACK MENZIES | <i>Addison Pitt.</i> |
| PARKER | <i>C. A. Chandos.</i> |
| LUCAS | <i>John Marble.</i> |
| LADY CRACKENTHORPE | <i>Kate Meek.</i> |
| THE HON. MILLICENT KEPPEL | <i>Jane Marbury.</i> |
| THE HON. MRS. COLQUHOUN | <i>Ann Warrington.</i> |
| MRS. O'MARA | <i>Ida Waterman.</i> |

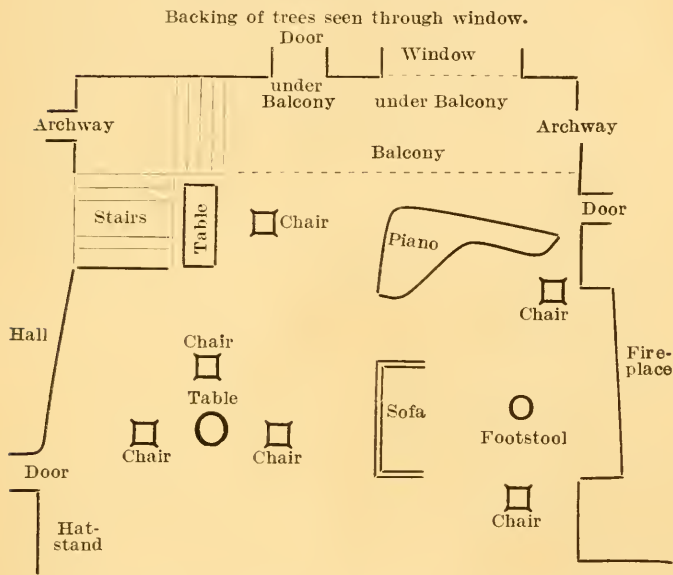
and

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| PEGGY | HENRIETTA CROSMAN. |
|-----------------|--------------------|

ALL-OF-A-SUDDEN PEGGY

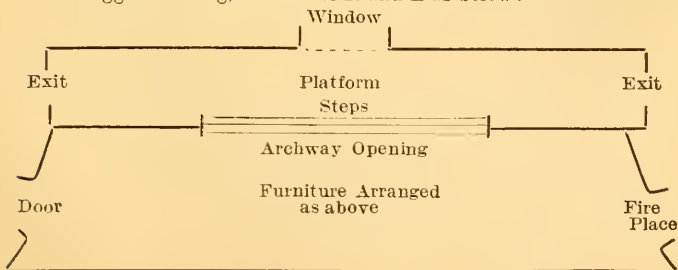
ACT I.

The Scene is the Hall at Hawkhurst, LORD CRACKENTHORPE'S Country House, in Surrey.



PLAN OF SCENE FOR ACTS I. AND III.

N.B.—The above Staircase and Balcony are not essential, and for Amateur performances one simple archway opening at back can be substituted, with narrow platform (two steps up from stage) to suggest landing, with exits R and L as below:—



The Hall is furnished comfortably like a room, with antique furniture. Folding doors into outer lobby, R. Big old-fashioned fireplace, L. (with high fender), over which is a long shelf of old books. The staircase curves round, as shown in sketch, and ends in landing, from which there is an exit through an archway. A big mullioned window, with leaded panes, on landing, and another under landing, which lights the Hall itself. On both are stained-glass armorial bearings. A back-cloth of trees and garden are seen through these windows. Rugs and skins on the floor, and a suit of armour at foot of stairs. Settee and table, C.

(When the curtain goes up, LADY CRACKENTHORPE is discovered nodding, on the settee. She is a severe, elderly lady with white hair and a prominent "Duke of Wellington" nose, and a hard, haughty, unsympathetic manner. Enter MILLICENT KEPPEL through folding doors, R. She is a fresh, healthy-looking girl of 20. She has a bag of golf clubs.)

MILLICENT *(as she bursts into the hall)* Has Jimmy come yet? *(she goes up and throws her golf clubs down with a clatter in corner up R.)*

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. *(waking with a start and looking round at MILLY)* Good gracious!

MILLICENT. *(still up stage pulling off gloves)* Why, mother, you don't mean to say you actually dared to go to sleep?

(Enter PARKER through upper door, L. He is in livery and carries a silver tray, on which is a plate covered

with a silver dish cover. He crosses R. to stairs, in front of MILLY.)

MILLICENT. (*coming down C. and pointing*) Why, where are you taking that, Parker?

PARKER. (*stopping R. near foot of stairs and turning*) To his lordship's study, miss.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*rising*) Oh, there must be some mistake, Parker. Lord Crackenthorpe can't have ordered anything to eat at this time in the afternoon.

PARKER. (*stiffly*) Beg pardon, my lady, but this is not anythink for 'is lordship to eat,—leastwise, I presoom not, my lady.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Then why that dish cover?

MILLICENT. (*crossing R. to PARKER and going to lift cover*) Yes, what's underneath?

PARKER. (*with an immovable face*) A spider, miss.

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE and MILLICENT both give a startled cry.)

MILLICENT. A spider? (*shrinking back*) Ugh! Take it away! Take it away!

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. A spider? . . . *There?* . . . What's the meaning of this, Parker?

PARKER. The under 'ousemaid found it in 'er second 'elping of pudding in the servant's 'all, my lady. This is 'er plate, my lady.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. What ? . . . Then take it back to the kitchen at once.

PARKER. Beg pardon, my lady, but we 'ave strict orders to take all spiders we find to 'is lordship's study, my lady, an' this is an unusual large one, my lady, otherwise the under 'ousemaid might have swal—er—mightn't 'ave noticed it, my lady.

(MILLCENT *laughs and turns up, and takes off her hat and jacket and puts on table at back.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*with a slight shudder*) Oh, very well, if those are Lord Crackenthorpe's orders. (*sits on settee, L.*)

PARKER. They're his *strict* orders, my lady.

(*He goes up the stairs with great dignity, holding the silver tray and contents in front of him, crosses landing at head of stairs and exit L.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*irritably*) Oh-h-h ! Anthony and those wretched spiders of his ! What possessed him to take up such a weird hobby ? He'd never have got into the clutches of these O'Mara people, if he hadn't.

MILLCENT. (*coming down to table c., suddenly*) By the way, I suppose Anthony's *alone*, mother ?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Oh yes, he's safe, for the moment.

MILLCENT. Oh, then Peggy O'Mara's out ? (*sits sideways on table c.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Yes, thank Heaven, and her mother too. Do you think I should have ventured to go to sleep if they were *in*? (*groaning*) Oh, it's like living on the edge of a volcano.

MILLICENT. (*laughing*) It's more like sitting on the top of one, to prevent it going off.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*groaning*) Since those awful O'Maras came to stay in this house, I—well, I can't breathe properly, in anything but a tea-gown. (*rises and crosses agitatedly to fireplace*)

MILLICENT. (*sliding off the table*) Well then, I should have a couple of frocks let out a bit, if I were you, mother,—just for days when the “volcano” is *unusually* fizzy, don't you know.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*turning sharply*) Millicent, how can you be so flippant when any moment I may be—be turned into a dowager. (*groaning*) Oh, if *only* Anthony had been a girl!

MILLICENT. (*with a wicked little chuckle*) Yes, *he'd* never have known the difference. (*shaking her head at LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) It was really rather careless of you, mother. (*she turns and goes up to window at back*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*severely*) Millicent!

MILLICENT. (*looking out of window*) Oh, here's Uncle Archie. (*laughs and turns*) *He* doesn't seem to object to Peggy O'Mara. You should have seen him with her on the golf links this afternoon.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. *What?* (*indignantly*) And he was supposed to be keeping his eye on An-

thony. Oh-h-h ! There's no trusting Archie where there's a petticoat.

MILLICENT. (*coming down, laughing*) Oh, he'll make out that it was (*imitating*) "all for the good o' the fam'ly," just you see if he doesn't.

(*Enter MAJOR ARCHIE PHIPPS through door down L.*
He is a tall, well-preserved, aristocratic ex-cavalry officer of 55. He has a prominent "Wellington" nose, and wears a white drooping cavalry moustache, and his grey hair is distinctively thin on the top and carefully arranged to cover as much as possible. He is smartly dressed in tweeds, a tightly fitting tail coat, rather tight trousers, and wears white spats, a single eyeglass, and a square-topped grey felt hat. He has been a "dog" in his day, and still is jaunty and rakish.)

ARCHIE. (*looking round*) Oh ! so Jimmy's not turned up yet. (*putting hat and stick on hatstand down R.*) No fresh developments while I've been off duty,—what ?

MILLICENT. (*leaning over table C., quizzically*) "Off" duty, Uncle Archie, you looked as though you were on duty, with Peggy O'Mara, this afternoon.

ARCHIE. (*completely taken aback*) Eh—what ?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*severely*) How could you go out with that girl, Archie ?

ARCHIE. (*taking cheroot from case, a little confused and guilty*) Eh—what ? . . . W-well, dash it all,

I—er—well,—it was all for the good o' the fam'ly, Charlotte, 'pon my soul it was.

MILLICENT. (*laughing and clapping her hands*)
Ha! ha! ha! What did I say?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*sharply to ARCHIE*) Rubbish! How could it be?

ARCHIE. (*lighting cheroot*) Why, don't ye see, I—I was just keepin' her out of Anthony's way, until Jimmy came. Abs'lutely part of our plan o' campaign.

MILLICENT. (*sharply*) Why, what's that? . . . What's Jimmy got to do with Peggy O'Mara?

(ARCHIE and LADY CRACKENTHORPE exchange glances and at that moment the “toot” of a motor-horn is heard, off.)

ARCHIE. Hello, by Jove! That'll be Jimmy, I should think.

(MILLICENT turns and runs to window at back, followed by ARCHIE.)

MILLICENT. (*at window, looking out*) It is, on Jack Menzies' motor.

(*She waves her hand, and rushes across and off through hall door R.*)

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE sits on settee.)

ARCHIE. (*glancing at door, and coming down to LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) I say, I suppose you'll tackle Jimmy about this, Charlotte?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Well, seeing it was your

idea, Archie, I think it would come best from *you*. Besides,—well, this is not a very nice scheme of yours, you know.

ARCHIE. Eh, what? Oh, come, Charlotte, when we're in a tight place like this, we can't stick at trifles; besides, well—it's all for the good o' the fam'ly.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*drily*) Not forgetting *yourself*, Archie.

ARCHIE. Eh? (*pulling his moustache*) Yaas, yaas, of course. (*hastily glancing at door*) By the way, speakin' of myself, Charlotte, you don't happen to have a spare fiver about you, do you?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. What, again, Archie? (*sighing*) What is it now?

ARCHIE. Well, ye see, I want to run up to town this afternoon—to (*he avoids her eye, and puffs his cheroot*)—to see my—er—my dentist.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*sceptically*) H'm! That's the third visit to your "dentist" in a fortnight.

(ARCHIE *avoids her eye, coughs and puffs his cheroot furiously.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*warningly*) You'd better persuade Jimmy to help us, Archie. If that O'Mara girl *does* catch Anthony, it's good-bye to Hawkhurst for both you and me, and then you—— (*drily*) well, you'll have to find a less expensive—dentist.

(*Motor is heard just outside R. and PARKER enters L. and crosses to folding doors R., and goes out, and voices are heard in the hall, off R.*)

JIMMY. (*off*) Yes, that's my bag, Parker—come in, Jack.

(*Enter JIMMY KEPPEL, he is a bronzed, good-looking man of about 35. He is wearing a tweed suit and a light overcoat and cap, and is very dusty. He is followed by JACK MENZIES, a young man about JIMMY'S age, who comes in talking to MILLICENT. PARKER follows carrying suit-case, which he places on chair L. of writing-table at back.*)

ARCHIE. (*cheerily to JIMMY*) Hullo, had a good run down? (*shakes hands with MENZIES*)

JIMMY. (*taking off overcoat and giving it to PARKER*) 'Bit too much dust. (*crosses and kisses LADY CRACKENTHORPE lightly*) Well, mater, here I am, according to orders. (*then crosses to MILLICENT above table and kisses her*) Well, Milly, old girl, how are you?

(*JACK MENZIES crosses L. to LADY CRACKENTHORPE.*)

JACK. How d'you do, Lady Crackenthorpe? (*shakes hands*)

JIMMY. (*putting his foot on chair L. of table c. and dusting his boot*) Well, what's all this about Anthony, mater?

(*ARCHIE and LADY CRACKENTHORPE exchange hasty glances, and ARCHIE looks up at ceiling and either sings, softly, or whistles, a snatch of a song.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*hastily turning the conversation*) Oh—er—how's your uncle, Mr. Menzies?

JACK. Just about the same, thanks.

JIMMY. (*dusting his clothes*) He always is, worse luck !

MILLICENT. Jimmy, you mustn't say such dreadful things.

JIMMY. *You'd say a long sight more* dreadful things if you'd to chuck away *your* best years on a rotten tea plantation in Ceylon, as I have, when I might have a comfortable shop at home here, but for that miserly old——

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Hush, Jimmy !

ARCHIE. (*to JIMMY*) Buck up, my dear feller. Jack'll see you get that land-agent's billet, all right.

JACK. (*crossing R. to JIMMY and patting him on back*) Jimmy knows that. Directly I come into the property, I'll cable for him to come the next day.

(*Slight pause, ARCHIE sings—or whistles—again and looks at ceiling.*)

JACK. (*looking round*) Well, I'll be movin'. (*to LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Just goin' to motor over and see the old man as I'm so near, Lady Crackenthorpe ; and, besides, I see you all want to talk.

OMNES. (*in polite protest*) Oh, no, no !

ARCHIE. Not a bit, my dear feller, don't hurry,—(*moving hastily to door R.*)—er—shall I let you out ?

JACK. (*crossing R.*) No, don't move anybody, I'm coming in on my way back. Shan't be long.

JIMMY. Good man !

(*JIMMY follows him to door, and exit JACK after a general nod to everybody. JIMMY stands watching*

him off at open door. ARCHIE crosses to back of table c.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*turning to JIMMY*) Well, so you got my letter, Jimmy?

JIMMY. (*turning, laughing*) 'Should think I did. 'Funniest thing I've heard for a long time.

(*LADY CRACKENTHORPE starts and frowns at him in surprise.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*coldly and severely*) Did you read *all* my letter, James?

JIMMY. Lord, yes. (*chuckles again and sits on chair R. of C. table*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Then can't you realize what is taking place?

JIMMY. Well, I can't realize it, but you say this Miss What's-her-name—Peggy O'Mara, is running old Anthony to earth,—what?

MILLCENT. (*sitting on table above JIMMY*) No, Jimmy, it's her mother who's doing it, *I* say.

JIMMY. But, look here. I'm a bit puzzled. Anthony doesn't usually allow women within ten feet of him.

ARCHIE. Ah, but that's the danger; these are *scientific* women, my dear feller, that's the devil of it.

JIMMY. Where did he pick 'em up? . . . Who asked 'em down here?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Anthony invited them, himself, and as it's his house, I had to back up his

invitation, of course,—besides, I'd never seen them, and now——

ARCHIE. They're *here*, and (*spreading out his hands*)—here we are !

JIMMY. (*ironically*) Jove ! How you do grasp things, Uncle Archie.

(ARCHIE *glares at him through his eyeglass and turns up stage, huffily.*)

JIMMY. (*rising and crossing to LADY CRACKENTHORPE and laying his hand on her shoulder*) Well, of course it's jolly rough on you, mater, having to clear out, but—men will marry. There's no stopping 'em.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. But Anthony is not like other men.

JIMMY. (*chuckling*) No, by Jove, you're right there. Anthony—well, Anthony's unique.

(*Enter ANTHONY on landing at back. He is a man of about 40, with an odd, lanky, awkward figure, a pale, gaunt face, and a touzled head of mouse-coloured hair—one tuft sticking straight up behind. He wears pince-nez, and an extraordinary mixture of clothes, altogether presenting a grotesque figure. He cocks his head at an angle, comically, as he peers through his glasses, and has an abruptly jerky manner of speaking, and an occasional, sudden, unexpected laugh.*)

ANTHONY. (*excitedly, calling over banisters*) Is Miss O'Mara there ?

(They all turn and look at him.)

JIMMY. Hullo, Anthony, old chap! *(crosses to foot of stairs R)*

ANTHONY. Oh, is that you, James? *(he crosses and shambles jerkily down the staircase with a bundle of papers in his hand, talking as he comes)* Has any one seen Miss O'Mara anywhere?

MILLICENT. *(getting off table and looking up at ANTHONY)* No, she's out.

ANTHONY. Out? . . . *(fretfully)* Tut, tut! Then, where's—

(Abruptly snatching JIMMY'S hand, giving it one brief shake, and then dropping it, and turning with a jerk)

—where's her mother?

MILLICENT. Mrs. O'Mara's out, too.

ANTHONY. *(fretfully)* Tut, tut! I particularly wanted to consult them about a title for my book. *(he sits R. of table C. and sorts his papers)*

JIMMY. *(coming down to R. of ANTHONY)* Hullo, been writing a book, Anthony?

ANTHONY. *(turning and speaking over his shoulder)* Er—well, not yet, but I'm going to. On "Spiders"—for the people. Cheap and quite "popular," of course. And as Miss O'Mara writes herself, I—

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Oh, ^{just} only stories and things,—not "spider" books, Anthony.

ANTHONY. *(turning sharply on LADY CRACKEN-*

THORPE) What of that?—what of that? Miss O'Mara and her mother *understand* spiders. They seem instinctively *drawn* to spiders.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*grimly, with an angry sniff*) H'm! Naturally! I'm not surprised. A fellow feeling, of course.

ANTHONY. (*drawing himself up, glaring at LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Mother!

MILLICENT. (*hastily to ANTHONY*) Mother only meant that people who've lived among spiders, I mean people who must have had to swallow spiders at every meal——

JIMMY. (*startled*) What? "Swallow spiders"——

ANTHONY. (*interrupting*) Er—*conversationally*—merely conversationally.

MILLICENT. I meant that, of course. Living with a man like the Professor, they'd *have* to.

ANTHONY. (*beaming delightedly*) The Professor! Ah, that reminds me. (*turning to JIMMY*) Are you aware that we have the widow of the celebrated Professor O'Mara, F.R.S., under this very roof? . . . It may seem incredible to you, but it's a fact. (*turning to LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Isn't it, mother?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*with a groan*) Oh yes, it's true enough.

ANTHONY. (*turning proudly to JIMMY*) There! Think of that! And—(*impressively*)—his daughter sitting in my study.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*starting up, with an alarmed cry*) What? . . . I thought she was out.

ANTHONY. (*irritably*) Tut, tut! I meant this morning, mother.

(MILLICENT *crosses to* LADY CRACKENTHORPE *and stands at end of settee*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*subsiding into her seat with a relieved sigh*) Oh-h-h!

ANTHONY. (*to* JIMMY) Miss O'Mara helped the Professor with his book on spiders. She's been at work with me, all this morning. She gave me every encouragement.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*grimly*) I can imagine it. She *would!* (*through her clenched teeth*) Oh, the little——

(MILLICENT *tries to pacify her.*)

ANTHONY. (*to* JIMMY) It's an exceptional opportunity, the chance of a life-time. Even *you* must see that, mother?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*with suppressed anger*) Oh yes, I can see it, plainly enough. (*in a lower tone*) So can *she*. (*under her breath*) Little cat!

(ARCHIE *tries to pacify her.*)

ANTHONY. (*peering at his papers and not hearing this*) Oh, well, I must go. (*abruptly turning to* JIMMY) You staying?

JIMMY. Just for the week-end.

ANTHONY. Oh, then we can talk at dinner. (*importantly*) My time is precious. (*rising abruptly and shambling up the staircase, talking as he goes*)

Let me know as soon as either Mrs. O'Mara or her daughter come in. (*he suddenly stops and gives a cry*) Ah ! Excellent !

(*They all turn and look at ANTHONY, who looks over banisters, beaming through his spectacles.*)

I've got my title ! As it's to be a " popular " book, I might call it *The Autobiography of a Spider*, eh ?

(*There is a moment's silence. JIMMY turns and explodes into his handkerchief. ARCHIE grins and pulls his moustache to hide it, and crosses to fireplace and stands with his back to it.*)

MILLICENT. (*controlling her amusement*) How awfully good !

ANTHONY. (*with his sudden, short laugh—complacently*) Yes, I really think it sounds attractive, eh ? . . . Don't you think so, mother ?

(MILLICENT nudges LADY CRACKENTHORPE.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*hastily*) Eh ? Oh yes, I think it sounds most amusing.

ANTHONY. (*his whole expression changing—aghast*) " Amusing ? " (*outraged*) " Amusing ! " (*angrily*) I see it's useless discussing some matters with any one but the O'Maras. (*with a snort of disgust*) " Amusing ! " Ptcha !

(*He goes off L. muttering, " So like mother." Exit L. through archway on landing.*)

(*They all turn and look at JIMMY.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*to JIMMY*) There ! You can see for yourself.

JIMMY. (*shaking his head*) By Jove ! They do seem to have got hold of him. It's those confounded spiders. That's their strong card.

ARCHIE. (*coming forward to foot of settee*) Course it is ! Don't ye see, they're the only women he's ever met who haven't loathed spiders. That's the devil of it.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*irritably*) I can't see why on earth spiders were ever invented. They're no earthly use to anybody.

JIMMY. (*shaking his head*) Oh, aren't they ? (*drily*) You ask the O'Maras. They look like being jolly useful to them. (*he goes up, opens his suit-case, on chair near writing-table, and takes out cigarette case*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*stamping*) Then we must prevent it.

JIMMY. That's all very well, mater—but—how ? (*shutting up bag again*)

(ARCHIE *looks inquiringly at LADY CRACKENTHORPE and she motions for him to begin.*)

ARCHIE (*bracing himself*) How ? Well,—(*laughs nervously and comes to table c.*)—that's where you come in, my dear feller.

JIMMY. (*coming down to table c., half puzzled and half amused.*) I ? . . . How ? What do you want me to do ? . . . Kidnap Anthony, or marry the girl myself ?

(ARCHIE and LADY CRACKENTHORPE stare at him in astonishment and exclaim together)

ARCHIE. } Well, bless my soul!

and } (together)

LADY C. } How did you guess it?

JIMMY. (*looking at them in astonishment*) What?
 . . . I was only rotting. (*lights a cigarette*) Why,
 good lord, you're not both of you serious?

ARCHIE. By Jove, we are, though, dead serious;—
 ain't we, Charlotte? So *will* you, my dear feller?

JIMMY. (*chaffingly*) Will I what? Kidnap Anthony,
 spiders and all, and cart him out to Ceylon?
 (*sits on chair R. of table C.*)

ARCHIE. (*impatiently*) No, my dear feller, no!

JIMMY. (*half laughing*) Well, you can't mean
marry the girl?

ARCHIE. (*tugging at his moustache, nervously*)
 Well, no, my dear feller, you needn't *marry* her—
 unless, of course, you want to.

JIMMY. (*ironically*) Oh, don't consider me,
 Uncle Archie. (*he turns to LADY CRACKENTHORPE*)
 What's he getting at, mater?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Well, it's no use beating
 about the bush, we want you to make up to this
 O'Mara girl, and distract her attention from Anthony.

MILLICENT. (*who has been a puzzled listener until
 now—indignantly*) Mother! So *this* is your—

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*severely*) Millicent.
 Hush!

(ARCHIE also “*hushes*” MILLICENT).

JIMMY. (*quietly*) Oh, so it's a case of drawing a red herring across the trail, and I'm to be the red herring, Uncle Archie—what?

ARCHIE. (*coughing, awkwardly, and puffing at his cheroot*) No, no, dash it all! You—well, it's all for the good o' the fam'ly, and so—well—— (*breaks off in confusion and smokes furiously*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*anxiously*) Well, Jimmy?

ARCHIE. (*anxiously*) Yes—yes,—what d'ye say, my dear feller?

JIMMY (*turning*) Say? (*he rises and, with a half-laugh, says contemptuously*) Rot! (*turns and strolls across R., smoking*)

(MILLICENT *looks pleased and sits on chair below fireplace.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*aghast*) What?

ARCHIE. (*following JIMMY a step*) Here, I say, dash it all, my dear feller, don't talk like that. What's to become of me—er—I mean, think of your mother. Think of the fam'ly. You're our sheet anchor.

JIMMY. (*turning*) Oh! I was the family red herring a minute ago—I'm getting on.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*rising—indignantly*) Do you mean you'll actually see your brother trapped, and your mother turned out of her home here, without raising a finger to prevent it?

JIMMY (*with a troubled face*) I'd do a good deal to prevent it, but when it comes to hoodwinking a girl who's never done anything to me——

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. But she's doing things to me, and to Anthony.

ARCHIE. Yes, by Jove, to *all* of us, my dear feller.

JIMMY. (*turning to* MILLICENT) You're keeping very quiet about it all, Milly. What do *you* say?

MILLICENT. (*rising and coming to* L.C.) Well, if you want my honest opinion, I think Peggy O'Mara's not half a bad sort. She's a bit harum-scarum, of course, but I rather like her. Of course, I don't believe she cares a scrap about Anthony.

JIMMY. No, no, we'll let her off that. The point is—is she an outsider?

(ARCHIE and LADY CRACKENTHORPE are both about to reply to JIMMY when MRS. O'MARA'S voice is heard off R. calling.)

MRS. O'MARA. (*off*) Peggy! Peggy!

ARCHIE. (*quickly to* JIMMY) H'st! Look out. Here's the mother.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Now you can see for yourself. (*she sits down on settee again.*)

(*Enter* MRS. O'MARA L. through door R. *She is a plump Irishwoman of about 45. In reality a pleasant-looking woman, but on this, her first entrance, she is at her worst, being terribly untidy, her hair tumbled and coming down, an "impossible" hat, tilted over one eye, a short skirt and mackintosh, sufficiently short to disclose a clumsy pair of walking boots, very muddy. She looks "impossible" and out of place in her surroundings, and adds to this*

impression by speaking with a pronounced Irish brogue. She carries a large pocket-handkerchief—with the corners tied to form a bag—carefully, as though something precious were inside.)

MRS. O'MARA. (*as she enters*) Aw, what's got the gyurl, now? (*she stops dead on seeing the family gathered together*) 'Deed an' I didn't know annybody was here. (*backs to door again.*)

MILLICENT. (*coming forward*) Come in, Mrs. O'Mara.

MRS. O'MARA. Aw now, I know I'm lookin' horrud. But ut was in the cause of science, anyhow, an' brains were made before bonnets, as the Professor used to say. If I'd known ye'd visitors, now—— (*looking at JIMMY*)

MILLICENT. Oh, this is only my other brother—Jimmy. (*to JIMMY*) This is Mrs. O'Mara, Jimmy.

(*JIMMY comes down towards MRS. O'MARA, and bows to her.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*with a smiling nod*) Sure an' I'd have known ye annywhere from yer likeness—(*JIMMY smiles*)—to your brother.

JIMMY. (*his face falling*) What? (*stiffly*) Oh! Really! (*he turns and looks annoyed*)

MRS. O'MARA. Have ye seen Peggy annywhere, Miss Millicent?

MILLICENT. No, I thought she was out with you, Mrs. O'Mara.

MRS. O'MARA. 'Deed, no. Then where'll I be finding his lordship, now ?

MILLICENT. Anthony's in his study.

MRS. O'MARA. Then I'll be goin' there, if ye'll excuse me. Maybe Peggy'll be there, too. (*turns to staircase*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*sharply*) Indeed she's not.

MRS. O'MARA. (*resignedly*) Aw sure, that gyurl's never where she should be.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*rising and advancing a step—getting angry*) I can't see the slightest necessity for your daughter to be in my son's room.

(ARCHIE and MILLICENT attempt to suppress LADY CRACKENTHORPE.)

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, but "necessity" is only another name for inclination, where two young people are concerned, Lady Crackenthorpe. (*goes up staircase*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*frigidly*) I don't understand you.

MRS. O'MARA. (*turning, sweetly*) Aw now, is ut so long since ye was young yerself, that ye've forgotten the way av ut ?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*turning away indignantly*) Oh-h-h !

MRS. O'MARA. (*pausing on staircase to peep into her handkerchief*) Aw, look at that now, I've lost me spider.

MILLICENT. (*crossing to foot of stairs*) You don't mean you were carrying a live spider in your handkerchief?

MRS. O'MARA. (*kneeling on landing and looking about*) 'Deed an' I was—a beautiful trap-door spider, too. (*rising*) Aw well, Peggy must go back and catch another for his lordship. He'd rather she gave it him than me, I'm thinkin'. (*calling down*) Don't ye think so, Lady Crackenthorpe?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*turning and speaking tartly*) No! I think your inference is distinctly premature.

MRS. O'MARA. (*crossing landing at top and speaking down*) Aw well, ut's well to be on the safe soide. If ye're not *premature* nowadays, ye're anticipated.

(*She nods and smiles and exits L.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*turning to JIMMY, choking with indignation*) There! (*sits down on settee*)

ARCHIE. There! (*coming down to table C. and waving his hand towards MRS. O'MARA'S exit*) What d'ye make o' *that*, my dear feller?

JIMMY. (*crossing slowly L. to fireplace, and standing with his back to it*) She certainly means business, there's no doubt about it. (*to MILLICENT*) I say, Milly, is this girl—Peggy, anything like—*that*? (*he jerks his head towards staircase.*)

MILLICENT. (*sitting on end of settee*) Oh, no, not a scrap.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Ptcha! Not *now*, but it's only a question of time.

ARCHIE. But at present, there's no denyin' she's devilish pretty.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*severely*) Archie!

ARCHIE. (*hastily*) Er—unfortunately! That's what I meant, Charlotte—"unfortunately."

JIMMY. Oh well, I want a bit of sugar on the pill.

(*They all look at JIMMY curiously.*)

ARCHIE. (*starting forward*) By Jove, that means you will help us?

JIMMY. Well, it's a bit of a facer to think of people like that getting hold here.

ARCHIE. (*leaning across table c.*) Then why hesitate so, my dear feller?

JIMMY. (*uneasily*) Well, it doesn't seem quite cricket.

ARCHIE. Why! Dash it all, you needn't commit yourself, you've only got to sorter *dazzle* the girl, that's all.

(*JIMMY grins in spite of himself.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Yes, once I get them out of the house, you can leave the rest to me.

JIMMY. Oh, then the programme is—I dazzle the girl, and *you* do the rest, what? (*thinks a minute and then shrugs his shoulders*) Oh well, *somebody's* got to do something; I suppose I'll have to have a shot at it.

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE and ARCHIE both give audible sighs of relief.)

ARCHIE. (*coming to him, slapping him on back*)
Bravo! Good man!

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*with a sigh of relief*)
Ah—that's all right.

JIMMY. (*shaking his head and crossing slowly to L.*)
Oh, don't you be so sure. Goodness only knows how it'll turn out.

(*At this moment MRS. O'MARA'S voice is heard off upstairs.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*off*) Peggy! Where in the wurrl'd have ye been, now?

(PEGGY'S voice is heard off through open window at the back.)

PEGGY. (*off—laughs lightly and then calls*) I daren't shout it all, come down, and I'll tell you.

JIMMY. (*turning quickly to ARCHIE*) Is that——?

ARCHIE. (*nodding*) Peggy.

(*He goes up to the window, followed by JIMMY.*)

ARCHIE. (*pointing out of window*) There she is,—look.

JIMMY. By Jove! She is a pretty girl. (*suddenly backing out of range of window*) She's coming in. (*he turns C. hastily and crosses to staircase*) Here, where's my kit?

(*He snatches up his suit-case, which is standing where he left it, and begins to spring up the staircase three*

steps at a time. They all turn and call up, in surprise, to him.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Jimmy, don't go.

ARCHIE. Here, dash it all! What are you goin' to do?

JIMMY. *(from landing, speaking down)* What am I going to do? Why, I'm going to wash. I couldn't dazzle that girl with a grimy face.

(He dashes off R. and exits.)

(MILLICENT goes up to window at back and looks off.)

ARCHIE. *(pulls his moustache complacently)* Well, I've pulled it off for you, Charlotte, so, if you *could* put your hand on that fiver, I really must go up to town to-day—er—my dentist—y'know.

(He slowly makes his way round to fireplace during the next few sentences.)

(Re-enter MRS. O'MARA down the staircase. She has changed her dress, and smartened herself generally, and now looks quite presentable.)

MRS. O'MARA. *(as she comes down)* Hasn't Peggy come in? I've just been speaking to her, and——

(As she reaches the bottom, the door under gallery at back bursts open and enter PEGGY. She is a bright, pretty, impulsive girl, who looks about 25. She is simply dressed on her first entrance, in a blue serge skirt and a blouse, and a simple hat. She looks full of health and high spirits, and speaks impulsively and frankly, ignoring all conventions and proprieties

in a perfectly simple and ingenuous way. She is—in short—a perfectly natural, unspoiled, and slightly wild Irish girl. She only uses a touch of the brogue, very occasionally, and as a joke, her speech ordinarily being quite pure. The moment she appears MRS. O'MARA begins to speak reprovingly.)

MRS. O'MARA. (*shaking her finger*) Peggy!—

PEGGY. (*cutting in and shaking her finger at her mother, in comic imitation of the severe parent*) Mother! Now, where *have* you been?

MRS. O'MARA. (*with a helpless gesture to ARCHIE*) Aw, listen to that, now. Taking me very wor-rds off me lips.

PEGGY. (*mischievously, and dropping into the brogue like her mother*) Sure, an' where else would I take them from, mother darlin'? But there, now, I'll put something better in their place. (*she runs across, gives her mother a hug and kisses her affectionately.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*smiling, and giving her a little push*) Aw, git along with yer coaxing ways, an' tell me what ye've been doing?

(*Re-enter ANTHONY down the stairs. He joins the group.*)

PEGGY. (*her eyes dancing with mischief*) Well, I've had such a queer—— (*breaking off*) Oh, but perhaps the others are not interested, mother.

ANTHONY. On the contrary, we are intensely

interested ;—(*turning to* LADY CRACKENTHORPE)—
aren't we, mother ?

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE *turns her back, and* ARCHIE
soothes her.)

MILLICENT. (*trying to cover her mother's attitude*)
Have you had any tea, Miss O'Mara ?

PEGGY. (*sitting down on L. of C. table*) Well, no,
it was— (*with a wicked glance at* LADY CRACKEN-
THORPE)—ginger beer.

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE *turns sharply and stares at*
her.)

MILLICENT. (*blankly*) Ginger beer ? (*incredu-
lously*) *Ginger beer ?*

ANTHONY. (*turning sharply on* MILLICENT) Why
not ? Why not ?

ARCHIE. (*vastly tickled*) Haw ! haw !

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE *looks at him severely and he*
hastily turns his laugh into a cough and strolls to
fireplace. ANTHONY *is above table C. and* MILLICENT
sitting on arm of settee.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*frigidly*) Ginger beer ?
(*closing her eyes*) How utterly impossible !

MRS. O'MARA. (*sitting on chair R. of C. table,*
blandly) Aw, nothing's impossible where Peggy's
concerned, when she's in one of her wild moods, Lady
Crackenthorpe.

PEGGY. (*taking off her gloves*) Mother, I'm sur-
prised at you. I've only been—paying a call.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*again rising to the bait*)

I wasn't aware that you knew any one in this part of the country.

PEGGY. (*innocently*) I don't.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Then how have you—who did you——?

PEGGY. Well, you see, I just—dropped in.

MRS. O'MARA. Dropped in? Where, Peggy?

PEGGY. (*demurely*) Into the trout stream, mother.

ANTHONY. (*concerned*) Good gracious!

(ARCHIE is again enormously tickled and chuckles.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE turns and looks at him and he stops.)

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, lave off yer humbugging, Peggy. What'll his lordship be thinkin' of ye? What's the truth av ut, annyway?

PEGGY. Oh, it is nothing. I was hunting for some trap-door spiders, on the banks of the trout stream, and I slipped in, that's all.

ANTHONY. (*alarmed*) Dear me! Not in the deep part, I hope.

PEGGY. On no, I only went up to here. (*points to her knees*)

MRS. O'MARA. Peggy! (*starting forward*) An' you sitting there talking in yer wet—— (*kneeling and grasping PEGGY'S skirt below the knees and then sits back on her heels on floor*). Why, ut's dry!

PEGGY. Of course it is dry, *now*,—that's where my afternoon call comes in. Well, when I'd scrambled out. I started to walk back——

MILLICENT. Like that? Why, it's four miles.

PEGGY. Yes, and with my shoes full of water, and my skirt—well, perhaps you've none of you ever tried to walk four miles in a soaked skirt.

ANTHONY. (*perfectly seriously*) No, no, never! Never!

(ARCHIE chuckles behind his hand, again.)

PEGGY. Well, don't. After the first mile I gave it up, and that's where the call came in.

(ANTHONY goes to assist MRS. O'MARA to rise, but she pushes him into her chair R. of table, while she remains sitting on her heels on the floor.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Where could you think of calling, in that state?

PEGGY. It was a cottage.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*sneering*) Oh, you said an "afternoon call"!

ANTHONY (*turning sharply on LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Don't interrupt, mother. (*to PEGGY*) Yes? Yes? Yes?

PEGGY. Well, I went up, and I knocked till I was tired, but no one came. Well, the door was only closed, so I pushed it open and called out, "Hullo," just like that. Not a sound, so I—well, I was feeling desperate by this time, and I walked in.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*disapprovingly*) You walked in?

ANTHONY. (*turning sharply to his mother and jerking out*) Why not? Why not?

PEGGY. There wasn't a soul in the place, but there was a nice fire in the kitchen, so after I'd looked round and made quite sure there was no one about, I went into the kitchen and slipped off my skirt——

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*scandalized and gasping*)
You slipped off your skirt?

(*She half rises, and* MILLICENT *and* ARCHIE *pacify her*)

PEGGY. (*innocently*) Well, there was no one there. If *you'd* felt as uncomfortable as *I* did, I'm certain *you'd* have done the same.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*scandalized*) I? . . .
In a strange place like that. (*turning indignantly to* ARCHIE) Really, Archie!

ANTHONY. (*sharply to* LADY CRACKENTHORPE)
Why not? Why not?

ARCHIE. Er—h'm! (*He chokes another laugh into a cough and tries to pacify* LADY CRACKENTHORPE *in dumb show*)

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, but supposin' annybody had come in, now, Peggy?

PEGGY. What *is* the good of supposing things that don't happen, before they *do*?

ANTHONY. Absolutely useless.

MILLICENT. Well, it certainly was rather a risky thing to do.

PEGGY. Oh, I never thought about that. I was only too glad to get that horrid wet skirt off, and hang it before the fire.

MRS. O'MARA. But, sure, Peggy, your—(*her eye catches ANTHONY and she stops*)—er—well, more than yer skirt must have got wet, annyway?

PEGGY. Oh yes, my shoes and stockings, of course, but I took those off first.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*rising*) You needn't go into any further details, please.

ANTHONY. (*turning sharply on LADY CRACKENTHORPE as before*) Why not? Why not?

(ARCHIE *simply explodes and turns his back.*)

PEGGY. (*innocently*) Oh, there were no other details—I mean I had no other—(*pulling up hastily*)—er, well, it was a hot day, and I—I was dressed for walking.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Oh-h-h!

MRS. O'MARA. But did ye never think that one of the inhabitants might have been a man?

MILLICENT. (*coming and sitting on back of c. table*) Yes, perhaps a *rough* man, too.

PEGGY. Oh no, he was a gentleman, I'm sure.

MRS. O'MARA. Then there *was* a man?

PEGGY. (*cheerfully*) Oh, yes. I saw all his pipes and fishing rods and things.

ARCHIE. (*fixing in his eyeglass*) But why were you so cock-sure he was a gentleman, Miss O'Mara?

PEGGY. Why, he had almost as big a collection of actress's photographs as you have, Major Phipps.

ARCHIE. (*taken aback*) Eh—what? (*turning away*) Er—h'm-m!

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*to PEGGY*) You found out all this, and still stayed?

PEGGY. Well, blue serge takes such ages to dry. That's when I saw the things. You see, I had to wander about a bit, to kill time.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*collapsing in her chair again*) "Wander about" with only your—Oh-h-h-h! (*she sits, inexpressibly shocked*)

PEGGY. (*unable to see LADY CRACKENTHORPE'S grievance*) But—he was out.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*wheeling round*) Then may I ask who gave you (*bitingly*) the "refreshment" you spoke of?

ARCHIE. (*trying to get level*) Yes, what price the ginger beer, eh?

PEGGY. (*easily*) Oh, I forgot about that. I was awfully thirsty, and there were some bottles of stone ginger beer on the table, so I opened one,—that's all.

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, Peggy, that reely was takin' a liberty, now.

PEGGY. Oh, I left twopence by the empty bottle, mother.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*sarcastically*) Dear me. How *very* punctilious of you.

PEGGY. Oh, Lady Crackenthorpe, you don't mean to say *you'd* have stolen it?

ANTHONY. (*jerking round abruptly on LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Really, mother, you surprise me. (*LADY CRACKENTHORPE turns once more to ARCHIE for sympathy*)

MRS. O'MARA. An' is that all, Peggy ?

PEGGY. Oh, yes. I put on my dry things, left a little note explaining what I'd done, and where I was staying——

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*starting violently, and almost shrieking as she echoes PEGGY's words*) Where—you—were—staying ? (*closing her eyes and gasping*) Oh !—my salts. Get me my salts.

ARCHIE. (*looks round*) Where is that confounded bottle, Milly ?

(MILLY *looks round and then runs upstairs and off.*)

PEGGY. Well, it would have been rather horrid of me to have left without thanking my host, wouldn't it, Lord Crackenthorpe ?

ANTHONY. (*beaming at her*) Charming of you to think of it.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*sharply*) Nonsense, Anthony. You must forgive my saying, Miss O'Mara, that I consider that the whole incident was indiscreet to a degree.

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, but that's just Peggy all over, Lady Crackenthorpe.

PEGGY. (*indignantly*) Mother !

MRS. O'MARA. I mean ye never look before ye leap until after ut's over. Ye must admit it now, Peggy.

PEGGY. (*smiling*) I'm afraid I never look even then, I leave other people to do that.

(MILLICENT enters L. on landing with smelling bottle and crosses R.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*tartly*) And what if the "other people" misconstrue things, Miss O'Mara?

PEGGY. (*lightly*) Oh well,—(*shrugging her shoulders*)—as we say in Ireland, "harm to them that thinks it."

(MILLICENT suddenly stops on small landing with a shriek.)

MILLICENT. (*looking at her feet*) Oh! What an awful spider. (*she gathers up skirts.*)

ANTHONY. (*excitedly*) A spider? Where? Where?

(*He hurries up to landing and drops on his hands and knees.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*suddenly*) Sure, an' it'll be the same I lost. (*she hurries up the stairs after ANTHONY*)

ANTHONY. (*going flat on his body on landing, in the excitement of the hunt, and rising with spider between finger and thumb, triumphantly*) Ah-h-h! (*he pulls out his pocket lens and examines it*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*joining him and examining it*) Sure, ut's the very same, indeed.

(MILLICENT crosses round behind them, and comes down with smelling bottle.)

ANTHONY. (*gloating over spider and calling down to PEGGY*) A quite exceptional specimen! Miss O'Mara,—look here.

(PEGGY runs up the staircase and she, MRS. O'MARA and ANTHONY all stand on landing examining the spider in dumb show. LADY CRACKENTHORPE, ARCHIE and MILLICENT form another group down stage L. and talk in rapid undertones.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*sniffing smelling bottle—irritably*) It's monstrous! Why wasn't Jimmy here, he'd have seen for himself (*her voice rising*) what an impossible——

MILLICENT. (*glancing at group on stairs*) Mother! Hssh! Please!

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*stamping her foot*) I will not "shish." She's absolutely shameless. Is Jimmy never coming down?

ARCHIE. (*in a low voice*) Here, dash it all, do keep hold of yourself, Charlotte, or you'll spoil everything. I'll go up and rout Jimmy out, and send him down.

(*He crosses R. and goes up stairs and off L.*)

MILLICENT. Let us leave them, and go into the drawing-room, mother.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Oh, very well. (*she crosses L. with MILLICENT, giving one vindictive glance at group on stairs and protesting in dumb show as she exits, L., with MILLICENT*)

ANTHONY. (*examining spider through pocket lens and speaking to PEGGY*) Well, you may be right. We'll examine the bristles under the microscope.

PEGGY. (*turning*) Yes, that'll prove it. (*she*

runs down the stairs into hall, leaving ANTHONY and MRS. O'MARA on landing—calling back as she descends) There's a diagram of it in papa's book.

ANTHONY. Is there? Excellent! It's in the study, we'll look it up. (*jerks abruptly round and walks L., saying excitedly*) Come along, come along.

MRS. O'MARA. (*signalling significantly to PEGGY to come upstairs again and rejoin them*) Come up, and go with his lordship, Peggy darlin'!

PEGGY. (*standing c., back to audience*) Oh no, it's *you* he wants, mother. (*she sits down at piano*)

(ANTHONY *stops and looks from one to the other.*)

PEGGY. (*calls up to him from the piano*) I'm no use to you, Lord Crackenthorpe; it was mother, there, who helped papa with that section of the book. (*she plays a few bars of "La Matichiche"*)

ANTHONY. (*turning and eyeing MRS. O'MARA delightedly*) Really? How very interesting. (*turning L., excitedly*) The microscope's quite ready in the study, so if you *wouldn't* mind assisting me—(*moving L.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*fairly caught*) Oh, I shall be delighted. (*she turns to follow him*) But,—Peggy'd best come, too.

ANTHONY. Eh? (*carelessly*) Oh!—by all means, if she wishes.

PEGGY. (*still playing piano softly*) I—I'll follow you, mother.

ANTHONY. (*absently, absorbed with the spider*)

Yes,—yes,—you needn't hurry. So long as Mrs. O'Mara will come. (*moving L. to MRS. O'MARA*) So kind of you to—— (*he goes through archway, and the remainder of his sentence is lost as he exits L.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*crossing landing after him and leaning over banisters after his exit, and calling down in a loud whisper*) Peggy, if ye don't come soon, I'll——

ANTHONY. (*off*) This way, Mrs. O'Mara, come along.

(*PEGGY plays on gaily.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*throws up her hands in despair, and then shakes her fist at PEGGY*) Oh-h-h !

(*Exit after ANTHONY L., leaving PEGGY in the hall below alcove.*)

PEGGY. (*turning laughingly C., clapping her hands triumphantly, she then, humming gaily, takes off her hat, throws it on the table, then crosses L. to ingle nook, and dragging a big old chair to wall, stands on seat, and looks at row of old books, on high book-shelf, selects one, and takes it out, exclaiming*) Phugh ! How dusty ! (*she blows dust off top of book and without getting off chair, sits on back, with her feet resting on seat, and turns over the pages*)

(*Re-enter JIMMY on landing, R., with ARCHIE, who points down to PEGGY.*)

ARCHIE. (*sotto voce, to JIMMY*) There she is, now go in and—"dazzle her."

(JIMMY *laughingly pushes ARCHIE off R. and then crosses landing to stairs. He puts his tie straight, settles his collar and linen, pulls down his waistcoat, and then descends with the air of a conqueror. PEGGY has her back to him and doesn't see him, and is too much engrossed in her book to hear. As he comes down she changes her volume for another, which is also dusty, and just as JIMMY crosses to her chair, she turns sharply, and, before she sees him, blows a cloud of dust from top of book all over him.*

JIMMY. (*falling back a step, his eyes full of dust and coughing*) Ugh! . . . Pff! . . . H'm!

PEGGY. (*standing on armchair*) Oh, I am so sorry. I never heard any one come in. I hope I haven't made you *very* dusty.

JIMMY. (*coughing a bit*) Ugh! Oh, no! (*cough*) Not the least bit—(*coughs*)—thanks.

PEGGY. (*looking*) Why, your coat's simply covered. (*she throws book down*) I'll get a clothes-brush (*she jumps down impulsively, looks about, and goes up to hall table at back and fetches a clothes-brush*)

JIMMY. (*protesting*) No, really—please. (*dusting himself with handkerchief*)

PEGGY. I insist. (*coming back with clothes-brush and giving it to him*) It was awfully stupid of me, blowing all my dust over you like that.

JIMMY. (*gallantly—brushing himself at random*) Not at all, awfully stupid of me to—to get in the way of your dust, don't y'know.

PEGGY. (*watching him critically*) You know, you're not brushing anywhere near the dust. (*impulsively*) Oh, let me. (*she seizes the brush and begins to brush his shoulder*) There! Now, turn round.

(JIMMY turns, and PEGGY vigorously dusts his shoulders and back.)

JIMMY. (*over his shoulder*) I say, really, I can't let you——

PEGGY. (*intent on her work*) Oh, please stand still, your back's awful. Those books can't have been dusted for years. (*she steps back and surveys him*) There! You're all right now.

JIMMY. (*turning*) Awfully good of you, really. Perhaps I ought to introduce myself.

PEGGY. (*starting and turning face to audience*) Oh! Good gracious! I forgot about that. What will you think of me?

JIMMY. How d'you mean? What's wrong?

PEGGY. Why, to be talking to you, and—(*she suddenly begins to laugh*)—thumping your back like that, when I don't even know your name.

JIMMY. Oh, that's nothing. It seemed the most natural thing in the world.

PEGGY. Yes, that's just it. I'm always being "natural," that's where I'm always getting into trouble. Being natural seems against the rules, but it's so hard to remember. (*looking at brush*) Especially with a clothes-brush!

JIMMY. Why with a clothes-brush in particular ?

PEGGY. (*leaning against settee*) Why, haven't you noticed ? It's almost impossible to brush any one down, without a sort of feeling that you've known them for years.

JIMMY. I suppose that cuts both ways. I feel—(*he comes forward and looks straight into her eyes*)—as though I'd known you, all my life.

PEGGY. (*freezing, and dropping clothes-brush into his hand and speaking tartly*) Oh, then I'm sure you must be simply aching to get away from me. I think you'll find Lady Crackenthorpe and Miss Keppel in the drawing-room. (*sits on settee*)

JIMMY. (*throwing clothes-brush on table*) Oh ! I've seen both Milly and the mater, thanks.

PEGGY. (*turning sharply, surprised*) “The mater” ? . . . Why, who——

JIMMY. (*crossing round top of settee and standing facing her*) Oh, I forgot. I'm Jimmy, you know,—Jimmy Keppel. I thought you'd have spotted the family likeness.

PEGGY. Who to ?

JIMMY. Well, to—(*he pauses, with a self-satisfied grin*)—to my brother Anthony, for instance.

PEGGY. Oh, that's absurd.

JIMMY. Awfully nice of you to say so.

PEGGY. Nice of me,—how ?

JIMMY. Well, Mrs. O'Mara said she'd have known me from my likeness to him, anywhere. (*he grins again complacently*)

PEGGY. (*taking his measure*) Oh, but you mustn't believe Mrs. O'Mara ; she *always* flatters everybody.

(*With this parting shot, PEGGY turns, picks up her book and sits with her back half-turned to him, reading it. JIMMY stands, a bit shaken by his first tumble, wondering what to do next. PEGGY peeps round at him over the top of her book, mischievously. He turns sharply and she ducks behind her book. JIMMY turns away again thinking, and then he smiles to himself, evidently having got another plan of attack. He adjusts his tie, touches his collar, and pulls down his waistcoat as before, and strolls across to PEGGY*)

JIMMY. (*innocently*) I say, forgive me for interrupting you a minute, but you haven't by any chance seen Miss O'Mara anywhere about, have you ? (*he looks about as if in search of her*)

PEGGY. (*turning sharply*) What do you—— (*she checks herself suddenly, and playing up to him, says*) Why ? Do you want to see her ?

JIMMY. (*emphatically*) Awfully.

PEGGY. (*amused*) Really ? Why ?

JIMMY. Eh ? Oh, I've heard such a lot about her, don't you know, and I'm awfully keen on having a look at her.

PEGGY. Well then, I should advise you to—"have a look," that's all. (*she turns and pretends to read her book*)

JIMMY. (*looking about room*) Look ? . . .
Where ?

PEGGY. (*dropping into the brogue*) Sure, I was thinkin' ye'd be knowin' me, from me likeness to me mother.

JIMMY. (*falling back with mock astonishment*)
What ?

PEGGY. Well, Lady Crackenthorpe says *she'd* have known me from my likeness to mother,—anywhere.

JIMMY. (*with mock incredulity*) No, you can't mean that you are Miss O'Mara ?

PEGGY. (*laughing*) Of course I am.

JIMMY. (*dropping into a chair as though absolutely overcome*) Good Lord ! I—I'd no idea—I should never have guessed—I never dreamt—why, you're ——— (*he jumps up and shakes her hand*) By Jove, I really am awfully glad to meet you,—really.

PEGGY. Gracious !—did they make me out as bad as all that ?

JIMMY. (*going nearer*) I don't believe they've ever seen you,—properly !

PEGGY. Perhaps *you* haven't. You see, I began by “throwing dust in your eyes,” didn't I ?

JIMMY. (*sitting down on settee near her*) I begin to see great possibilities in dust.

PEGGY. Yes, so do I, so I think we'd better—let it rest.

JIMMY. (*leaning towards her*) I'm jolly glad you didn't.

(PEGGY rises quickly and goes to fireplace, leaving JIMMY on settee—pause.)

I say, you know, you're not a bit like other girls.

PEGGY. Oh, so Lady Crackenthorpe told you that, did she?

JIMMY. (*impatiently*) Oh, never mind what the mater says.

PEGGY. I never do,—that's what annoys her so.

JIMMY. No, no, listen. What I mean is—you're not like any woman I've ever met.

PEGGY. Oh, what very funny people you must associate with. No wonder your mother shakes her head so, whenever your name is mentioned. (*she turns her back to him*)

JIMMY. (*rises and crosses to her, trying another tone, very seriously*) Miss O'Mara, I've only known you five minutes, is it too soon to ask a great favour?

. . . I want—

PEGGY. (*deliberately misconstruing his meaning*) To smoke? Do! I don't mind a bit, you'll find *The Field* and *Punch* on the table there. I'm going to read, too.

(*She comes back to settee and settles down to her book again, leaving JIMMY baffled and speechless. There is a slight pause. Then JIMMY lights a cigarette, picks up "Punch" from table, glances at it, but evidently without reading it. He then glances round at PEGGY, and then again scratches his head in a puzzled fashion and thinks. Suddenly he smiles as*

though a fresh idea had struck him. He throws down his paper, settles his tie again, pulls down his waistcoat, with the old confident air, then sighs and mutters gloomily)

JIMMY. (*with mock dejection*) Ah, well. Just my luck ! Jolly hard lines, though.

PEGGY. (*turning, politely*) I'm sorry. I was reading. What did you say ?

JIMMY. Oh, nothing, nothing. I was only thinking. (*he thrusts his hands in his pockets, and stares at the ground despondently*)

PEGGY. Do you always think out loud, like that ?

JIMMY. Yes, often—(*sighs heavily*)—often. (*sits dejectedly on table c.*)

PEGGY. What's the matter ?

JIMMY. Oh, I was only thinking that it was awfully rough on me, for my people to have "put you off me" as they seem to have done. I mightn't have struck you as a bad sort of chap, if they hadn't.

PEGGY. (*hiding a smile*) Oh, it wouldn't have made any difference, really,—I always judge for myself.

JIMMY. (*ignoring this "dig"*) You know, nobody has ever understood ME.

PEGGY. (*consolingly*) Oh, perhaps they did, but didn't like to hurt your feelings by saying what they really thought about you.

JIMMY. (*wincing a bit, but sticking to it*) All I want is a little sympathy. That's all,—just a little sympathy.

PEGGY. Oh, if that's all you want,—I can promise you that.

JIMMY. (*springing up and coming to back of settee*) By Jove, do you mean you'll let me talk to you, and——

PEGGY. Oh, much better than that. If you really want sympathy and all that (*confidentially*),—you go into the conservatory after dinner to-night——

JIMMY. (*leaning towards her, eagerly*) Yes, yes——?

PEGGY. —And have a nice, long, quiet talk with——mother.

JIMMY. (*his jaw dropping*) What? . . . Well, I'm—— (*sits completely baffled and speechless*)

(*Enter BUTLER carrying salver on which is package, he comes to PEGGY.*)

PARKER. (*coming down to back of settee and holding out salver*) This has just come for you, miss.

(*PEGGY takes it, and PARKER exits at back.*)

PEGGY. (*excitedly*) Oh, it's the first ten chapters of my novel from the typist's. (*she opens and begins to feverishly turn over the sheets*)

JIMMY. Really, I'd no idea that——

PEGGY. (*breathlessly, without looking up*) Oh, do keep quiet for a minute, please.

JIMMY. Oh, I'm sorry. (*he walks away R. and then turns and watches her, puzzled, as he smokes between table C. and settee*)

PEGGY. (*disgustedly, as she reads*) Oh, it looks worse than ever in type. This won't do a bit. (*looking up—irritably*) Men simply drive me frantic. They *won't* talk.

JIMMY. I'm sorry, but I thought you asked me *not* to talk.

PEGGY. (*impatiently*) Oh, I didn't mean you. I was thinking about my novel.

JIMMY. Oh, so I'm talking to a lady novelist, am I?

PEGGY. There! (*stamping her foot*) That's exactly what I don't want people to find out. I can manage the women all right, but when it comes to the love scenes, my men are simply silly.

JIMMY. Well, that sounds all right. There's nothing much wrong with *that*.

PEGGY. No, no, I'm not joking, really. I simply can't get this bit right. (*springing up impulsively and sitting up on end of settee and saying all in a breath*) Oh, how *does* a man begin to make love to a girl he's fallen in love with at first sight, when he's never seen her in his life before?

JIMMY. (*putting his hand to his forehead, puzzled, staring at her*) What was that?

PEGGY. (*impatiently*) Well, *you* ought to know.

JIMMY. *I?*

PEGGY. Yes, you're a man. Besides, I'm perfectly certain, after the last half-hour, that you've made love heaps of times.

JIMMY. (*protesting*) Here, I say——

PEGGY. Oh, don't waste time. Now, supposing *you* were in this man's shoes, how would you begin?

JIMMY. How should I begin——

(He stops short as a thought strikes him, then puts down his cigarette, smiles, puts his tie straight, pulls down his waistcoat as before—and then turns to PEGGY with an intensely serious expression)

JIMMY. Well,—I think I should begin by saying : “I've been looking for you for years.” Then I should take hold of her hand, like this——

(He takes hold of PEGGY's hand, but she pulls it away sharply.)

PEGGY. *(shaking her head, knowingly)* No, thank you. I know that way. In another minute you'll be calling me “Peggy,” and pretending you'd “lost yourself in your part.” In five minutes you'd be—— No, thank you, let's try another way.

JIMMY. *(giving it up and becoming quite natural and serious)* What an extraordinary girl you are.

PEGGY. Yes, but about this man. Now, he's fallen in love at first sight——

JIMMY. P'tcha! There isn't such a thing.

PEGGY. What? But, this man *(tapping her manuscript)* has fallen in love at first sight, so there *must* be.

JIMMY. What I mean is, it isn't love at “first sight,” it doesn't begin then. What a chap feels about a girl, has been there all the time. It's only

been waiting until the right woman comes along, to bring it out.

PEGGY. (*clapping her hands*) Oh, that'll do beautifully.

JIMMY. (*puzzled*) Do? What for?

PEGGY. For my book. Do lend me a pencil.

JIMMY. (*hunting in his pockets*) 'Fraid I haven't got one.

PEGGY. Bother, I wanted to make a note of it, before I forget it. I shall let *my* man say that to the girl. It's a lovely idea. (*suddenly springing up impulsively and scattering her MSS. on the floor*) Oh, I wonder if you'd mind helping me with another man, who's worrying me?

JIMMY. 'Course I will. Trot him out.

PEGGY. (*jumping up impulsively*) He's in another story—I'll go and get the manuscript. It's in my room. (*she crosses R. in front of table and runs to the staircase, talking as she runs*) I won't keep you a minute. I know exactly where to put my hands on it,—don't go,—I'll be back directly——

(*She runs off talking, through archway L. on landing.*)

(*JIMMY watches her off and then turns C. with a puzzled frown on his face, and stands thinking. Enter MILLICENT through door, or archway L.*)

MILLICENT. (*looking round*) Oh! Are you alone, Jimmy? I thought Miss O'Mara was here.

JIMMY. (*shortly*) She was a minute ago. (*he*

turns away L. with his hands in his pockets, and crosses to fireplace, where he kicks a footstool viciously up stage)

MILLICENT. (*leaning back of settee*) What's the matter? Wasn't she "dazzled"?

JIMMY. (*wheeling round angrily*) Look here, stop that, Milly, I—I—well, stop it;—that game's off.

MILLICENT. "Off"? Do you mean she——?

JIMMY. (*decidedly*) I mean I'm not going on with it. It's off, I tell you, and I'd like to kick myself for ever listening to it, for a minute. (*he flings himself down on settee, angrily*)

MILLICENT. (*backing a few paces*) Jimmy, you don't mean to say she saw through it?

JIMMY. (*twisting round and facing her*) Good Lord, no! She's much too decent a girl to see through a shabby scheme like that, thank goodness. Why the deuce did you all let me in for it, by making me think she was a regular wrong 'un?

MILLICENT. I didn't.

JIMMY. (*indignantly*) No, but the others did. You might have given me the tip. Why, she's—well, all I can say is, if Anthony can get a girl like that to marry him, he'll be a jolly lucky beggar,—and you can tell the mater so, from me.

MILLICENT. (*alarmed*) I shall do nothing of the kind. I've had an awful time with mother, lately. Don't say anything like this to *her*, or——

JIMMY. (*starting up*) Well then, where's Uncle Archie?

MILLICENT. He's just driven off to the station. He's off to town for a few days.

JIMMY. (*striding angrily across R. and back again, as he talks*) Confound it, I'd like to have told *him* what I thought of him. It's no use, I'm going to wash my hands of the whole business—(*wheeling round at fireplace*)—where's the mater?

MILLICENT. (*appealingly over the back of the settee*) No, no, Jimmy, please. "Wash your hands" as much as you like, but don't tell mother that you're "washing" them.

JIMMY. Why shouldn't I?

MILLICENT. Well, my life simply won't be worth living if you do, so do let her *think* you're helping us, for a day or two, for *my* sake.

JIMMY. (*grumbling*) Oh, very well, but I mean it, you know. It's off. (*Sitting down on lower end of settee*) That girl's a brick, and if I were in Anthony's shoes, and she'd have me, by gad, I—I'd marry her next week.

MILLICENT. (*going round upper end of settee and coming down behind JIMMY with her hands on his shoulders and her cheek against his, and saying roguishly*) You might manage to do that *without* being in Anthony's shoes, if you talked to Peggy O'Mara like that. (*turns and crosses quickly to door up L.*)

JIMMY. (*turning, astonished*) What? (*starting up as though to follow MILLICENT*) Here, Milly, stop—

(MILLICENT *exits and shuts the door sharply.*)

JIMMY. (*slowly turns c. looking thoroughly startled. Slowly beginning to smile*) By Jove! It's she right, I'll—— (*he adjusts his collar and tie, and pulls down his waistcoat, as before*)

(*Re-enter PEGGY on landing, with manuscript in her hand.*)

PEGGY. (*talking as she hurries across landing, and comes running downstairs*) So sorry to have been so long, but my papers were in *such* a muddle. (*she comes L. and sits down on settee and sorts her papers, and then suddenly looks up*) Oh! before I forget it. Just tell me again how you worded that little bit about love at first sight. (*she gets her pencil ready*)

JIMMY. (*laughing*) I haven't an idea.

PEGGY. Oh, don't tell *me that*. Why, you must have said it to heaps of girls, to have had it off so pat.

JIMMY. No,—on my soul, I never said it in my life before.

PEGGY. What, do you really mean that a lovely idea like that just—rolled out, by accident?

JIMMY. (*looking at her meaningly*) Perhaps it wasn't—"by accident."

PEGGY. (*going down on her knees near settee, and picking MSS. from floor*) Then how *did* it happen?

JIMMY. (*coming down to L. of her*) Perhaps you brought it out. (*slowly and seriously*) Perhaps what I said about "love at first sight," applied to me—and you!

PEGGY. What? (*looking swiftly up, still on her knees*)

(*Pause. They look at each other in silence for a moment, then re-enter MRS. O'MARA on the landing.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*calling over banisters*) Peggy, what are ye doin'?

(*PEGGY and JIMMY start and look round, and PEGGY rises.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*from landing*) Come up to the study this minute. His lordship wants ye to look through the microscope at the bristles on that spider's left hind leg.

PEGGY. (*impatiently, as she crosses to table c. with her papers in her hand*) All right, mother, I'll come directly.

MRS. O'MARA. "Directly" is no time. Ye must come just now.

ANTHONY. (*off L.*) Mrs. O'Mara, you can see them better now, be quick, be quick.

MRS. O'MARA. (*turning distractedly*) Oh-h-h!
(*as she turns to go back to the study, L., she calls down*)
Come up, Peggy, this minute.

(*Exit L.*)

JIMMY. (*leaning over back of settee and watching PEGGY keenly*) Do you wish to go up to Anthony, Miss O'Mara?

PEGGY. (*decisively*) Of course not. (*she sits on*

chair L. of table frowning, and tapping her foot on ground)

(JIMMY crosses to her—she turns sharply as he is about to speak and asks abruptly)

Are you any good at plots ?

JIMMY. (*starting guiltily and turning his eyes away*) No ! I hate 'em.

PEGGY. Oh, I was wondering if you could help me with a plot I'm trying to work out, just now.

JIMMY. (*picking up a sheet of her MSS.*) Oh, you mean *this* kind of plot ?

PEGGY. (*stammering guiltily*) Y-es,—of course.

JIMMY. (*relieved*) Oh, that's all right. Fire away. (*he sits on back of settee facing her*)

PEGGY. (*looking at him quickly, then looking back L. to where her mother has just gone out, and then looking straight in front of her*) Now, supposing a girl—well, it's this way ;—a girl's mother wants to marry her off to a man the girl doesn't like, and, to get out of it, the girl conceives the idea of marrying her *mother* to the man, instead.

JIMMY. (*laughing*) By Jove, that's a new idea.

PEGGY. Yes, but the trouble is, that although the man *likes* the mother, he won't make up his mind to propose to her, while the *girl's* about, and the mother,—who's rather a dear—won't marry any one *herself* until the *girl's* married. Now, what ought the girl to do ?

JIMMY. Why, marry some other chap, that she *does* care for, of course.

PEGGY. No, no, that's just it, you see the girl's a—a—(*with a sharp glance at JIMMY*) a—musician, and doesn't want to marry anybody, she wants to be free to work.

JIMMY. (*frowning and thinking*) H'm, bit of a facer. (*suddenly*) By Jove! I have it. She'll have to *spooof* her mother.

PEGGY. (*puzzled and staring at him*) “Spooof her mother?” What do you mean?

JIMMY. Why, don't you see? She'll have to make her mother believe that she *is* married to some one else.

PEGGY. (*her lips parting, her eyes glittering, drawing in her breath*) Oh-h-h! I never thought of that.

JIMMY. Once her mother and the man think that she is married, *they'll* marry,—and *everybody's* all right.

PEGGY. (*her face simply alight with delight and excitement*) I—I'll do it.

(*She jumps up impetuously, scattering her papers all over the floor, and crying out impulsively to JIMMY*)

You—you darling! (*she puts her hands on his shoulders and kisses him in her delight and excitement. Then suddenly realizing what she has done, stands petrified, close to him, staring with comic horror straight in his eyes, with her hand over her mouth*)

(There is a second's pause, and they stare into each other's eyes, then PEGGY shrinks back with a horrified cry.)

Oh, what have I done ? *(backing away from him)*
I never thought what I was doing ! I—I'm *always*
doing things like that *(hastily correcting herself)*,—
no, no, no, I didn't mean that—I—— *(very confused)*
Oh ! what *will* you think of me ?

JIMMY. *(moving towards her, smiling)* "Think" ?
(advancing a step as though to take hold of her)

PEGGY. *(alarmed)* I—I think it's time I went
to mother. *(she turns, and makes a bolt for the stair-
case, and runs up the first flight hurriedly, turning and
speaking over banisters from the top)* I didn't mean it,
really. *(she runs hastily across landing at the top,
and then stops, extreme R., and leans over banisters,
and speaks down to him)* I—I just—*did* it,—all of a
sudden ! *(exits R., quickly, leaving JIMMY standing,
back to audience, C., looking up after her, as she exits)*

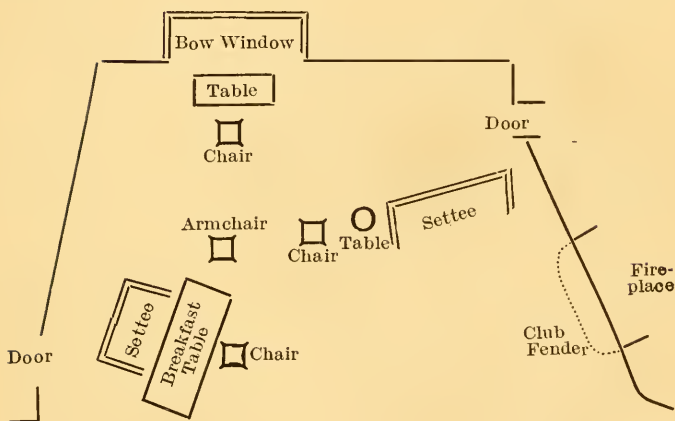
VERY QUICK CURTAIN.

ACT II.

“THE SUDDENNESS OF CONSEQUENCES.”

SCENE.—JIMMY'S flat in London.

TIME.—A week later.



PLAN OF SCENE OF ACT II.

JIMMY'S flat in Town is a cosily furnished man's room. Fireplace with high fender L., door between this and back wall. Large bow window across back, and another door down towards footlights on L. wall. Settee running out from fireplace. Small "smoking"

table to R. of it, and armchair R. of that. Slightly larger table, settee, and chairs, R., as on plan.

(At rise of curtain LUCAS is discovered C., he looks round the room and then goes and lifts up lower flap of table, R., and as he does so door bell rings off L. He exits L. Enter JIMMY in hat and carrying light overcoat. He turns and calls R.)

JIMMY. *(calling)* Lucas, just bring that bag here a minute, before you take it to my room. *(throws coat over chair at back.)*

(Enter LUCAS carrying suit-case seen in ACT. I.)

JIMMY. *(pulling off his gloves)* Stick it on that chair for a minute. I want something out.

LUCAS. *(puts bag on L.C. chair and undoes the catches)* I expected you back yesterday, sir.

JIMMY. Yes, I know, but I lost the last train. *(crossing to bag)*

LUCAS. *(fidgeting and a little nervously)* It was my thinking you'd be back, sir, that led me to——

JIMMY. *(rummaging in bag, and not listening to him)* Oh, by the way, I want all my things packed to-day, Lucas. I'm clearing out of here to-morrow, for good.

LUCAS. *(surprised)* To-morrow, sir? I thought you didn't sail until Saturday, sir.

JIMMY. *(digging out a box of cigars and some papers)* I don't, but I've just heard that your master's coming back to town on Friday. *(putting cigar box and papers on mantelshelf)* And as I don't want him,

after lending me his flat for six months, to find all my litter about when he comes back, I'll clear out to-morrow. (*pointing to bag*) I've done with that now.

LUCAS. (*closing bag and taking it off chair, picking up JIMMY'S coat and hat, standing holding them all*) About last night, sir——

JIMMY. (*as he glances at papers he is holding*) Oh, I hope you didn't wait up for me, did you?

LUCAS. (*uncomfortably*) N-no, sir, that's just what I——

(*The door bell rings and LUCAS starts and listens.*)

I expect that'll be the young lady, sir.

JIMMY. (*putting papers on mantelpiece, and turning sharply*) What young lady?

LUCAS. Miss O'Mara, sir——

(*JIMMY starts and turns sharply.*)

She called several times yesterday, and at last—— (*hesitates*) Well, I hope I did right, sir.

(*The bell rings again more sharply.*)

JIMMY. (*impatiently*) Don't keep her waiting.

LUCAS. (*going to door*) But I just wanted to explain, sir——

JIMMY. Oh, confound your explanations, they'll keep.

LUCAS. (*uncomfortably*) Oh, very well, sir, only I——

(*The bell rings again.*)

JIMMY. Oh, go to the door, confound you.

(LUCAS *exits with bag.*)

(*standing c., puzzled*) Peggy—here? What on earth—?

PEGGY. (*off*) Oh, he's come? That's all right.

(*There is a sound of hurrying feet and enter PEGGY—she bursts into the room impulsively, with a bunch of flowers in her hand. She is looking bright and full of high spirits, but attacks JIMMY with mock severity the moment she is inside the door.*)

PEGGY. (*with mock severity*) Well? Now what have you got to say for yourself? Do you *never* come home until—the next morning? . . . I wonder you can look me in the face. I've been waiting to see you for the last twenty-four hours. Where *have* you been?

(*She suddenly smiles, and they shake hands.*)

JIMMY. (*still holding her hand*) I was called away suddenly on Ceylon business.

PEGGY. But you said you should be in town every day until you sailed, or I shouldn't have come up.

JIMMY. (*still holding her hand*) I thought I should, and if I'd known there was the slightest chance of seeing *you*—

PEGGY. (*smiling*) There's always a chance of anything, where I'm concerned.

JIMMY. Yes, but (*drops her hand, and looks away awkwardly*) after your very definite refusal of me,

that last day at Hawkhurst, I thought we'd said good-bye for good.

PEGGY. (*hastily*) Yes, but—well, something's happened, and I had to see you. (*goes up and puts flowers down on writing-table*)

JIMMY. Why didn't you write, and let me know you were coming?

PEGGY. I couldn't, I only decided in the middle of the night. (*takes off her hat and puts it on writing-table*)

JIMMY. (*smiling*) In fact—"all of a sudden," eh?

PEGGY. (*smiling back*) Yes, and of course I had to pay for my suddenness.

JIMMY. How?

PEGGY. Well, just to think of poor little me, all alone last night, with my poor little nose glued to the window, watching for you at one o'clock in the morning.

JIMMY. (*startled and serious*) One o'clock in the morning? Where? . . . What window?

PEGGY. (*pointing to the bow window*) Why, *that* window, of course.

JIMMY. (*incredulously*) That window? . . . Good Lord, but how did you get back to Hawkhurst?

PEGGY. (*easily*) I didn't get back. (*crossing L. and fetching two vases from mantelshelf*)

JIMMY. Then where did you go?

PEGGY. (*in a matter-of-fact tone*) I stayed here. (*putting vases on table, c.*)

JIMMY. (*almost jumping*) Here ?

PEGGY. Yes. (*fetching paper of flowers from writing-table, and bringing them to table*) Didn't your man tell you I'd been here all night ?

JIMMY. (*gasping*) Good Lord, no. Not a word ! But what on earth possessed you to do such a mad thing ?

PEGGY. There ! That's just like a man. When it was all your fault, too.

JIMMY. (*bewildered*) My fault ?

PEGGY. (*sitting down L. C. and arranging flowers in vases*) Yes, of course it was. You should have either come back in decent time, or wired, or something, and——

JIMMY. And surely when I never turned up——

PEGGY. (*impatiently*) Oh, how on earth was I to know you'd never turn up, without waiting to see ? Do be reasonable.

JIMMY. (*crossing to R.*) But to wait *all night* ! I can't for the life of me understand how you could dream of——

PEGGY. (*stamping her foot impatiently*) Oh, wait, —listen ! I'd been calling here about once an hour, all day, and sitting in tea shops and the Park between whiles—until I was sick of the sight of both of them, and when I came back in the evening, for the eighth time,—I found I'd had my pocket picked, and so I asked your man to let me come in, and wait. As it happened, you'd promised him the night off——

JIMMY. Yes, yes, so I did,—I remember.

PEGGY. But he expected you back every minute, and of course he knew *me*, so he went out, and I came in, and waited.

JIMMY. All alone, here ?

PEGGY. (*taking vases and putting them back on mantelshelf*) Oh, I didn't mind that, I was only too thankful to be able to rest on that comfy sofa over there, and I was so dead tired, that I fell asleep,—fast asleep, in fact I don't remember anything more until your man came in and woke me, when—to my horror, it was after twelve.

JIMMY. Good heavens !

PEGGY. Well, I simply couldn't go wandering about to find a room, at that time of night. (*sits on club fender*)

JIMMY. Then what—where—— ?

PEGGY. Oh, I got your man to get me your slippers, and a travelling rug, and “bivouac-ed” on the sofa there. I was quite comfy, really.

JIMMY. (*crossing L. again, and standing near settee—anxiously*) But, my dear child, what about your mother—the people at Hawkhurst ? Do *they* know where you are ?

PEGGY. (*with her old mischievous twinkle in her eyes*) No !

JIMMY. Then what on earth will they think has become of you ?

PEGGY. Oh, that's all right. You see (*bubbling with laughter*) they think I'm *married* to you.

JIMMY (*starting violently and gasping*) WHAT !!

(He sits down suddenly and heavily on the settee, and stares at her with his mouth open. PEGGY grins at him wickedly. There is a moment's pause, when LUCAS enters, carrying folding breakfast tray, with breakfast. Dry toast, pot of honey, entrée dish with chicken, tea, etc.)

JIMMY. *(turning and waving LUCAS away, impatiently)* Take that away. I don't want any breakfast.

(LUCAS turns and is about to go.)

PEGGY. *(demurely)* But I do, please.

JIMMY. *(turning to her)* What, haven't you had any?

(PEGGY shakes her head.)

JIMMY. Here, stop, Lucas. You can put that down, and go and get another cup and things.

LUCAS. *(putting tray on table, R.)* I took the liberty of bringing breakfast for two, sir.

JIMMY. *(sharply)* What? *(shortly)* Oh, all right. *(turns away, looking annoyed and troubled.)*

(LUCAS arranges the breakfast, and PEGGY fills in the pause in the conversation by chattering brightly as she arranges vases on mantelpiece.)

PEGGY. These were the only flowers I could afford, this morning.

(JIMMY turns and watches her.)

That wretched pickpocket only left me with half a crown, that I had loose in the bottom of my pocket.

That's why I didn't breakfast out. I got these at Covent Garden. I've had *such* a prow! round. (*Stepping back and surveying her flowers*) There! They're not bad for sixpence, are they? I spent the rest of the half-crown at a hairdresser's, I couldn't have faced you without that. (*looking at herself in mirror on table L. C. and touching her hair*) They've made it a bit too fluffy, but still I don't look as though I'd been out all night, and that's something.

(LUCAS has now arranged the breakfast table and sets two chairs.)

PEGGY. (*crossing and clapping her hands as he draws back her chair for her*) Oh, breakfast. (*sits down facing audience and turns to JIMMY*) Come and sit down, I'm awfully hungry.

(JIMMY crosses behind her chair, glares at LUCAS, and then sits down on L. side of table.)

LUCAS. (*taking cover off entrée dish*) Fricassee of chicken, m'am. (*to JIMMY*) They forgot to send any fish, sir.

JIMMY. (*shortly*) All right. You needn't wait. (PEGGY has poured out tea, and helped herself and JIMMY to fricassee of chicken during this.)

LUCAS. Very good, sir.

(Exit LUCAS.)

PEGGY. (*pushing cup of tea towards JIMMY*) Oh, do wake up. You don't seem a bit interested in breakfast.

JIMMY. (*pushing his plate away*) I'm not. The only thing that interests me just now, is (*drily*)—our marriage.

PEGGY. (*looking up*) Our what? (*then seeing what he means and laughing*) Oh, I see—ha, ha! The salt, please.

JIMMY. (*hands the cruet to her*) When you've fortified yourself a little, might I be allowed to know *why* your mother, and mine, should think that you and I are married?

PEGGY. (*eating vigorously*) Well, it was your idea, you know.

JIMMY. (*starting up and staring at her*) My idea? Well, I'm—

PEGGY. (*holding up her knife warningly*) Hsh! If only you'd sit down and eat something, you wouldn't want to say such dreadful things.

(JIMMY stares at her helplessly.)

Don't glare so. (*eating*) This chicken's awfully tough. D'you mind cutting me some bread?

JIMMY. Eh? Oh, bread—certainly! (*beginning to cut bread*) This gets interesting. (*thoughtfully carving the loaf*) The people at Hawkhurst think we're married, and it was my idea. H'm! (*goes on solemnly cutting slice after slice of bread absent-mindedly*)

PEGGY. (*looking at pile of slices of bread he has cut, and then touching his arm, to attract his attention*) I don't want *much*.

JIMMY. (*roused as though awaking*) Eh? Oh!
(*hands her small piece of bread and then asks calmly*)
Do you happen to have any other interesting news
for me about myself? I seem to be a bit behind the
times.

PEGGY. Butter, please.

(JIMMY *hands her butter.*)

PEGGY. (*buttering some bread*) Speaking of news,
—I *must* tell you—

JIMMY. (*stopping her*) Wait a bit. I should
like to get the hang of this news first.

PEGGY. Why, don't you remember helping me
with that plot, the day we first met at Hawkhurst?

(JIMMY *looks puzzled.*)

The plot about a girl who wanted to marry her
mother. Why, you told me how to work it out.

JIMMY. Yes, I remember, but what's that got to
do with all this?

PEGGY. Everything. It was all true, and *I* was
the girl. (*eating*)

JIMMY. What?

PEGGY. Perhaps you didn't know, but mother was
awfully keen on marrying me to Lord Crackenthorpe!

JIMMY. (*drily*) M-m-m! Yes, I sort o' gathered
that.

PEGGY. Well, really, the proper person to marry
him, was mother, herself.

JIMMY. (*opening his eyes*) Oh! WAS she?

PEGGY. Why, they were simply made for each other,—anybody could see that.

JIMMY. (*drily*) M-m ! I don't believe my mother noticed it.

PEGGY. Well, the trouble was, that that dear, stupid, unselfish little mother of mine thought I ought to be Lady Crackenthorpe, and that dear, stupid brother of yours couldn't make up his mind while I was about, and there it stuck, until you gave me the tip.

JIMMY. What tip ?

PEGGY. Why, to make them both believe that I'd married somebody else, of course.

JIMMY. (*the whole thing striking him in a flash*) By Jove ! Then d'you mean you've made 'em all believe you're married to me ?

PEGGY. (*quaintly*) Yes. I ran away with you,—yesterday.

JIMMY. (*gasping—feebly*) The deuce you did !

PEGGY. (*laughing at him*) You'd better have something, really. I haven't half finished yet. Have some coffee ?

JIMMY. No, nothing but a brandy and soda'd be any good to me, now. Phew ! (*dabs his brow with handkerchief. Crosses behind her chair, up to window, agitatedly, and then comes down to L. of her chair*) It mayn't strike you as any business of mine, but, may I know where we're supposed to be now ?

PEGGY. I'm not sure ;—Paris, I should think, shouldn't you ?

JIMMY. Eh? (*giving himself up to it*) Oh, yes, yes,—'likely place for a sudden honeymoon. I suppose we *are* on our honeymoon, aren't we?

PEGGY. (*changing her plate*) Well, I'm not quite sure whether it's called a honeymoon when people elope, and get married at a registry office.

JIMMY. (*grimly*) Oh, so we were married at a registry office, were we?

(PEGGY *nods.*)

Any *particular* registry office, may I ask?

PEGGY. (*promptly*) Yes, the one in Mount Street, here, of course.

JIMMY. Oh, of course, I might ha' known.

PEGGY. (*rattling on, as she butters her bread*) You know, when I got up to town yesterday morning—(*breaking off*)—of course I slipped out of the house at Hawkhurst, before any one was up. I did the whole thing just as though I really *were* eloping, you know.

JIMMY. What, down to the thick veil, dressing-bag, and a farewell letter left in your bedroom?

PEGGY. (*nodding brightly*) Yes. (*putting down her knife and fork*) I'm tired of wrestling with this chicken. Is there any marmalade?

JIMMY. (*crossing to table and picking up pot, and reading label*) Oh, honey. (*brings it to her*) Most *à propos*—under the circumstances.

PEGGY. (*laughs and looking up at him*) Spoon, please.

(JIMMY *hands her a spoon.*)

PEGGY. (*laughing and helping herself to some honey*) Do smoke, if you won't eat, then I shan't feel I have to hurry.

JIMMY. Thanks. (*goes up and gets cigarette from box on writing-table*) Well, you left the usual letter for your mother, and——

PEGGY. (*interrupting*) No, not for mother,—it was for Lord Crackenthorpe.

JIMMY. (*coming down R. of table, surprised*) For Anthony? . . . Why on earth did you write to *him*?

PEGGY. (*chuckling over her bread and honey*) Oh, that was a great move.

JIMMY. How? (*sits down again on settee on PEGGY'S R.*)

PEGGY. Well, you see, I pretended in my letter to him that I *daren't* tell mother, and begged him to break the news to her, and—(*with a wicked twinkle*)—*comfort* her. See?

JIMMY. I should think I do? Anthony as the sympathetic friend, stroking your mother's hand. Your mother breaking down, and weeping on Anthony's shoulder;—I should think I do see.

PEGGY. (*eating bread and honey, complacently and smiling*) Yes! I think it was a brilliant idea of yours.

JIMMY. Eh? (*starting up*) Of mine? Oh, that's right, put it down to me. (*crosses L. C.*)

PEGGY. Well, I don't want to take all the credit.

JIMMY. (*turning and looking at her—drily*) Or the consequences, eh?

PEGGY. (*lightly*) Oh, let the consequences take care of themselves.

JIMMY. Oh, by all means, let 'em, if they only will.

PEGGY. (*thoughtfully*) I wish mother would write.

JIMMY. I wonder she hasn't turned up here, before now.

PEGGY. Oh, I wired to prevent that, yesterday morning.

JIMMY. Awkward thing to put in a wire, wasn't it ?

PEGGY. (*cheerfully*) Not a bit. I just put "Married—Mount Street—Registry Office. Off away—good-bye—Peggy."

JIMMY. (*gazing at her*) You are a marvel! . . . Then,—“the rest is silence?”

PEGGY. Yes, but she's sure to write here, and ask them to forward her letter. I'm simply dying to know what's happened.

JIMMY. Oh, you'll know soon enough. In the meantime it's a trifling and totally unimportant matter, but—what price me ?

PEGGY. How d'you mean ?

JIMMY. Well, seeing I'm supposed to have bolted with you, I'm in the limelight now. What is my precise position ? 'Seems to me you've landed both of us into a pretty tight place.

PEGGY. Well, that's rather where I thought you'd come in.

JIMMY. Oh,—how ?

PEGGY. By finding a way out of it.

JIMMY. (*drily*) Oh, I *thought* I should come in somewhere. (*looks at her and shakes his head*) You know, you ought to have let me into this before. You ought, really.

PEGGY. That means you think I've been horrid about it.

JIMMY. Not a bit, only seeing I was playing a star part——

PEGGY. (*hastily*) Oh! But I never intended you to play any part at all, until two days ago. But things had reached a crisis, and something had to be done quickly. I was desperate, and you weren't there to ask, there was no one else, and I—well, I did it. — (*rises, throws down her table napkin and crosses up to window seat*)

JIMMY. (*amused, in spite of himself*) “All of a sudden,” once more, eh?

PEGGY. (*sitting on R. corner of window seat*) I simply hated myself for having dragged you into it, when it was too late.

JIMMY. (*easily*) Oh, that's all right. (*goes up and sits on window seat near her*)

PEGGY. (*impulsively*) No, it isn't. When I came to think things over, in your room here yesterday, I was so wild with myself that I—I decided I would marry you, as you asked me to at Hawkhurst.

JIMMY. (*leaning towards her, eagerly*) Peggy!

PEGGY. (*holding up hand*) No, that was last night. Now that the excitement has worn off, I can see it wouldn't be fair to you.

JIMMY. Fair to me? Look here, I'm the best judge of that.

PEGGY. No, you're not. (JIMMY *is about to speak*) No, Jimmy, I *know* myself. Unless I loved a man more than I feel I ever shall love anybody, I should make his life a little—(*with a significant nod*)—you know what! (*lays her hand on his arm*) I like you far too much to risk that. It's no use, I'm too much in love with my writing.

JIMMY. But, look here, so long as I should be satisfied——

PEGGY. But you wouldn't. Men always say they'll be satisfied with "half a loaf," beforehand, but unless they get the whole loaf, afterwards, they always end by chipping a piece off some one else's.

JIMMY. (*beginning to protest*) No, no——

(*Enter LUCAS, L., with salver on which he carries newspaper and some letters. He crosses to JIMMY*)

LUCAS. (*holding out tray*) Beg pardon, sir, I quite forgot. Your letters and the morning paper.

JIMMY. (*impatiently*) All right. Put them down on the table, anywhere.

(*LUCAS places letters and newspaper on table L. c. and exits.*)

PEGGY. (*crossing hastily and looking through letters left by LUCAS*) Jimmy, here's a letter from Major Phipps; I know the writing. Do open it, and see if there's any news about mother. Be quick!

JIMMY. (*comes down on her R., takes and opens*

letter, glances through—and then suddenly his eyes start, and his whole face changes—staring at letter) The devil! (*then furiously*) The fool! Oh-h-h! The meddling old fool.

PEGGY. (*indignantly*) How dare you speak of mother like that.

JIMMY. Oh, I'm not talking about your mother,—it's Uncle Archie. (*points to letter and simply choking with rage*) He—he thinks we are married!

PEGGY. Well, of course he does.

JIMMY. Yes, but—he's stuck it in the paper!

PEGGY. You don't mean it.

JIMMY. (*furiously*) Yes, the old ass says he was lunching yesterday with a chap on the *Morning Post*, and asked him to work in a special paragraph,—some rot about having done it “for the good of the family” to stop people talking—— (*breaking off and handing PEGGY the letter*) Oh-h-h! The old fool. (*crumples up envelope and hurls it into fireplace, and paces up and down furiously*)

PEGGY. (*glances through letter and then turns to table*) Is that the *Morning Post* (*picks up newspaper*) Yes, let's look.

(*They both try to open newspaper different ways at same time. PEGGY gets sole possession, looks down and exclaims*)

Here it is.

JIMMY. (*looking over her shoulder*) Where? Where?

PEGGY. (*pointing*) There !

(JIMMY catches hold of one side of the paper, and PEGGY holds the other. They stand reading it, with their heads close together.)

JIMMY. (*reading out the paragraph*) "We are informed that the Hon. James Keppel, second son of the late Lord Crackenthorpe and brother of the present peer, was married—(*they pause, and look at each other*)—privately yesterday to Peggy, only daughter of the late Professor O'Mara, F.R.S., the eminent authority on Trap-door spiders. The ceremony was quite private, and the happy couple have left for the Continent, en route for the bridegroom's tea plantations in Ceylon."

(*They turn and look at each other.*)

JIMMY. (*unable to express himself*) There ! What d'you think of it ?

PEGGY. (*dropping her side of the paper, dropping on to settle, and going off into an uncontrollable fit of laughter*) Oh, ha, ha, ha, ha ! (*she laughs until she becomes quite hysterical and she cries with laughter, and sits down drying her eyes*)

JIMMY. (*watching her with a terribly serious face, and when her laughing fit has exhausted itself, speaking grimly*) It may strike you as funny to read about your wedding in the paper, but, perhaps you can tell me, what we are going to do now ?

PEGGY. (*still laughing in spasms and wiping eyes*) Oh, ha, ha, ha !

JIMMY. (*holding out newspaper*) Do you realize that this wretched paper will be on half the breakfast tables in London? How in the world are we going to contradict it?

PEGGY. (*sharply*) We're not *going* to contradict it,—*yet*.

JIMMY. Nonsense!

PEGGY. (*decisively*) Not until I hear about mother. Why, it would spoil everything.

JIMMY. (*protesting*) But, can't you see——?

(*Enter LUCAS.*)

LUCAS. (*announcing*) Mr. Menzies!

(*Enter JACK MENZIES, dressed entirely in black, carrying silk hat.*)

JACK. (*comes in breezily*) My dear old chap, this is splendid. (*slapping JIMMY on shoulder—to PEGGY*) How d'you do, Mrs. Keppel?

(*JIMMY starts at the "Mrs. Keppel," and turning away viciously, slaps his L. hand with folded newspaper, but JACK doesn't notice.*)

JACK. (*vigorously shaking PEGGY's hand*) Hearty congratulations! Jimmy's one o' the best. (*shaking his fist at JIMMY*) You old ruffian, to leave me to find it out from the paper. Hullo (*pointing with his stick to newspaper in JIMMY's hand*), havin' a look at it yourself—what? (*poking him in the ribs with his stick*) Good luck, old man; well now, come along, let's know all about it. (*sits on chair R. of*

table L. C. PEGGY *sitting on settee on his L.*) When did it come off?—Out with it.

JIMMY. (*the first chance he has had of speaking*) Look here, Jack, it's all——

PEGGY. (*cutting in desperately and drowning JIMMY*) No, no, Mr. Menzies, we're not going to tell you about what's over. It's—(*looking at JIMMY meaningly*)—it's our little secret.

JIMMY. (*impatiently*) Nonsense! Listen, Jack, I want to explain——

PEGGY. (*decisively to JIMMY*) No, Jimmy, I insist.

JIMMY. (*protesting*) But——

PEGGY. (*strongly*) There are no “buts” about it. I say—no!

JACK. (*applauding with his stick on the floor and chuckling*) Bravo! Mrs. Keppel, that's the style. You start as you mean to go on. Jimmy's wanted keepin' in order for a long time. (*looking at his watch*) But, look here, let's talk about the future, that's what I came in about, really. (*rushes on from this point to his exit, without a break, or giving any one a chance to get in a single word*) 'Fact is, Jimmy, you'll hardly believe it, but—the old man's gone. Died yesterday afternoon—poor old chap. Just off to see the lawyers now. Haven't a minute, but I felt I must slip in to say that the Land Agent's berth is yours, so you can cable out to Ceylon, and tell 'em to go to the deuce. (*turns to PEGGY*) Excuse me, Mrs. Keppel, but I'm a bit excited. Jimmy's

an old pal o' mine, and I've been sick to get this billet here at home for him, for years. 'Course now he's married, it's for *you* to decide, so talk it over, and settle it between you. (*backing to the door*) No, no, don't move, go on with your breakfast, let myself out. I'll either come back in half an hour, or ring you up on the telephone, to hear your decision. Good-bye. Good-bye Jimmy. Good-bye Mrs. Keppel.

(*Rushes out and bangs door, leaving PEGGY and JIMMY gasping and speechless—pause—they look at each other.*)

PEGGY. (*taking a long breath*) Oh-h-h! (*laughs*) "Mrs Keppel!" Did you hear him?

JIMMY. (*irritably*) Of course I heard him. Why didn't you let me tell him. What on earth am I to say to him now?

PEGGY. Oh, you'll take his offer, of course. Why, you've been simply aching for it, and now you won't have to go back to that horrid Ceylon. How *lovely* for you!

JIMMY. (*interrupting*) Oh, I'm not thinking about that, I'm thinking about Jack. (*suddenly*) Why, he'll be telling half London he's been here, and seen us. I must *stop* him. (*runs to bow window*) There he is, getting into a hansom. Hi, Jack, half a minute, Jack.

(*JIMMY rushes across room L., throwing newspaper on to settee as he passes, and exits L.*)

PEGGY. (*stands for a moment c., then runs up to bow window, and looks down into street and exclaims*) Ah, he's too late. That's all right. (*turns back into room smiling*)

(*Enter LUCAS with letter on tray*)

PEGGY. (*eagerly*) Oh, is that for me?

LUCAS. No, miss,—that is, it's addressed “Mrs. Keppel.” (*looks at PEGGY curiously*)

PEGGY. (*controlling her excitement*) Oh well, put it on the table. Mr. Keppel will be back in a minute.

(*LUCAS puts letter on table L. c., gathers breakfast things, and at that moment the hall-door bell rings*)

(*LUCAS takes breakfast tray and exits L.*)

(*The pause is filled by a street piano playing off*)

PEGGY. (*remains kneeling on window seat, until he has gone, and then impatiently seizes the letter*) It is from mother. (*Bursts it open, and looks through it feverishly, muttering words under her breath—simply reading aloud the words*) “Lord Crackenthorpe . . . turns over page) . . . has asked me to marry him.” (*utters a delighted cry, and waving the letter triumphantly, she waltzes wildly round the room*)

(*The door opens suddenly, and enter LADY CRACKENTHORPE and MAJOR ARCHIE PHIPPS. She is very smartly dressed, and the MAJOR is in a black morning coat and silk hat. They enter and stand staring at PEGGY.*)

PEGGY. (*waltzing until she suddenly finds herself*

face to face with LADY CRACKENTHORPE, and then stopping dead and putting her hand to her mouth, half checking a startled cry) Oh-h-h !

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*grimly*) Oh, so you're here ! I suppose you didn't expect to have to face me just yet. (*breathing short*) Where's my son ?

PEGGY. (*her eyes glittering wickedly a moment and then saying sweetly*) Jimmy's gone out. He'll be so glad you've come to see us so soon.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*indignantly*) What ?

ARCHIE. (*coming between LADY CRACKENTHORPE and PEGGY, C., and trying to smooth matters*) The fact is, we never expected to see either of you. We just looked in on the chance of the man here knowin' where you'd both gone. You see, we thought you'd slipped over to Paris or somewhere.

PEGGY. (*a little at a loss*) Well, you see—I—we—we changed our minds.

ARCHIE. (*placing his hat and stick on writing-table*) Ya-as, of course. Will Jimmy be long ?

PEGGY. No, he only ran down to the door. I wonder he didn't meet you on the stairs.

ARCHIE. Not me ! Nobody ever meets me on any stairs, when there's a lift.

PEGGY. (*listening suddenly*) Hsh ! I think I hear him. (*looks at them both irresolutely for a minute, and then suddenly runs to door, saying*) I'll tell him you're here.

(*Exits L. and shuts the door after her.*)

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE and ARCHIE look at each other.)

ARCHIE. (*pulling his moustache*) 'Deuced odd !

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*irritably*) Odd ? Most annoying, I call it.

ARCHIE. 'Don't see that. Why ?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*annoyed*) I didn't want to meet that girl. How on earth am I to treat her *now* ?

ARCHIE. Oh, kiss her and forgive her.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*drawing herself up*) Kiss her ?

ARCHIE. Of course—usual thing, an' seein' she's saved the show by boltin' with Jimmy——

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*irritably*) That girl my daughter-in-law ! It's no use, Archie, I'd better go. If I stay I shall be certain to quarrel with her, or else make a fool of myself.

ARCHIE. Then, for Heaven's sake, Charlotte, *make* a fool of yourself—that'll be easy enough.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*affronted*) Archie !

ARCHIE. Well, I mean—seein' we rushed Jimmy into this, you might—er—well, dash it all, it's all for the good o' the fam'ly, so——

(*Re-enter* PEGGY. ARCHIE stands R. C. and LADY CRACKENTHORPE .L.C.)

PEGGY. (*rather out of breath*) I was wrong. I've been down to the hall door, and he's nowhere in sight. (*hinting politely to get rid of them*) Perhaps you'd prefer to come back, a little later ?

ARCHIE. (*gallantly, fixing his eyeglass*) No, by Jove, we'll stay and talk to you, eh, Charlotte?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*stiffly*) I suppose we must.

PEGGY. (*blankly, standing c. between them, with a forced smile*) Oh, how—nice!

(*There is an awkward pause. ARCHIE ogles PEGGY through his eyeglass, pulls his moustache, and then laughs awkwardly. LADY CRACKENTHORPE maintains a frigid silence.*)

PEGGY. (*breaking the silence*) I don't think he'll be long. (*runs to window and looks down the street*)

(*ARCHIE nudges LADY CRACKENTHORPE and points to PEGGY, implying she must speak to her!*)

ARCHIE. Now's the time, Charlotte, buck up!

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*coughing nervously and speaking with an effort*) Well, Miss O'Ma—er—I mean—— (*doesn't know what to call PEGGY and at last, with a choke, says*) My—my dear—as Jimmy's mother, I suppose I—well, I suppose we—we—— (*ending abruptly and desperately*) Oh, for Heaven's sake, let's kiss and get it over.

(*PEGGY comes down with suppressed amusement.*

LADY CRACKENTHORPE stands c., and as PEGGY approaches her, she shuts her eyes and holds her cheek for PEGGY'S salute. PEGGY, her eyes dancing with mischief, instead of kissing LADY CRACKENTHORPE shuts her eyes, and holds out her cheek; so they both

stand, with tightly closed eyes and compressed lips, holding their cheeks towards each other, each waiting for the other's salute. ARCHIE shakes with silent laughter.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*without opening her eyes—in a chilly voice*) I'm waiting.

PEGGY. (*opening her eyes and taking a rapid glance at LADY CRACKENTHORPE, and then resuming former attitude and closing her eyes*) I'm quite ready.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*opening her eyes, and seeing PEGGY waiting patiently, with her cheek thrust out*) What! . . . Oh-h-h!

ARCHIE. (*motioning with his stick for her to kiss PEGGY*) Go on.—Switch on.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*hesitating a moment, and then with a great effort, crossing and abruptly pecking at PEGGY'S cheek, and moving quickly away, with a sigh of relief*) Oh-h-h! (*then under her breath*) Thank Heaven, that's over. (*crosses L. and sits on settee near fireplace*)

PEGGY. (*overhearing this, sweetly*) I feel quite like one of the family, now.

ARCHIE. (*straightening himself and brushing his moustache away from his lips*) Then, perhaps as one o' the fam'ly, I may be allowed to—— (*he crosses over to PEGGY to kiss her*)

(PEGGY backs away to R.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*severely*) Archie! I'm surprised.

PEGGY. (*sweetly*) Are you Lady Crackenthorpe ?
I'm not.

• (*ARCHIE turns up stage in a huff.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Speaking of the family,
I think *some* little explanation is due to us. Have
you nothing to say to me about all this ?

PEGGY. (*innocently*) Oh yes,—how's mother ?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*losing her temper*) I
haven't the faintest idea.

ARCHIE. (*coming down R. C. and trying to smooth
things*) No, you see, Charlotte and I were stayin' at
Windsor last night—a weddin' party,—so——

PEGGY. (*who still has her mother's letter in her
hand*) Oh, so you don't either of you know about—
mother ? (*glancing at letter*)

ARCHIE. Lord, no ! What's wrong ?

PEGGY. (*assuming innocent manner*) Oh, nothing.
Only I expect she'll be awfully worried about me.
You see, she'd always set her heart on my making a
really *good* match.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*indignantly*) What ?
You don't seem to realize that you are married to my
son.

PEGGY. (*demurely*) No, I'm afraid I haven't quite
realized it,—yet.

(*She sits on settee R. of breakfast-table R., and picks up
periodical lying on settee. There is another awkward
pause for a moment.*)

ARCHIE. (*uneasily*) Jimmy's a deuce of a time.

PEGGY. (*sweetly*) Yes, perhaps he saw you both coming.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*indignantly*) Miss O'Ma—I mean, Mrs.— (*with a burst of irritability*) Oh, what in the world *am* I to call you?

PEGGY. (*with unruffled sweetness*) Whatever you like, please. I suppose you'd like me to call you—"mother"?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*rises, and ARCHIE crosses and soothes her; she is fuming*) Archie, I simply can't stand much more. Will Jimmy never come? (*turns and goes up to bow window and looks out*)

(ARCHIE picks up the "*Morning Post*" from settee L.
Re-enter JIMMY through door, down stage L.)

JIMMY. (*coming in out of breath*) Couldn't catch him. Confound——(*stops dead, seeing ARCHIE*)
Hullo!

PEGGY. Oh, Jimmy, here's—mother. (*pointing up to LADY CRACKENTHORPE, who is leaning out of window*)

JIMMY. Who? (*at this moment LADY CRACKENTHORPE turns round*) Why, it's the mater.

PEGGY. I told you so.

JIMMY. (*puzzled up c.*) But you said——

PEGGY. (*sweetly*) "Mother."

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE is too angry to speak, and
fumes silently.)

ARCHIE. (*crossing R. with "Morning Post" in*

his hand—to JIMMY) Congratulate yer, my dear feller. Everybody will, when they know. (*pointing to newspaper he holds*) They soon will now, haw, haw! Hope you both of you liked my little “par” in the *Post* here. Deuced neatly worded, I think, considering. (*to PEGGY*) I’ll bet a fiver you never thought o’ puttin’ it in yourselves.

PEGGY. (*smiling*) No, we never dreamt of such a thing. It *was* clever of you to think of it.

ARCHIE. (*coming down to below chair R. C.*) Ya-as. I thought you’d be pleased. (*points to paper*) Such a dashed good place, too, no one can miss it.

PEGGY. Yes, in fact there’s only one little mistake about it, Major.

ARCHIE. Eh? (*looking at paper*) What’s wrong?

PEGGY. (*sweetly*) Well, you see—it *isn’t true*.

(*This falls like a thunderbolt. LADY CRACKENTHORPE comes down to L. C.*)

ARCHIE. Not true? (*he looks first at LADY CRACKENTHORPE, then at JIMMY, then at PEGGY, and then sits down heavily on chair R. C. by breakfast table*)

PEGGY. Jimmy and I are *not* married, at all!

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*gasping*) Not married?

ARCHIE. (*also gasping*) The devil!

JIMMY. (*coming forward and trying to calm his mother*) Now, don’t get excited, mater, do keep cool, and sit down, and——

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*furiously*) I will *not*

sit down. (*crosses in front of JIMMY to C.*) If that girl is not married to you, what is she doing here?

PEGGY. (*quite simply*) I'm staying here, that's all.

JIMMY. (*who is now down L. C., with horrified protest to PEGGY*) No, no, no!

PEGGY (*impatiently*) Well, I *was* staying here last night, then.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*immeasurably shocked*) Oh-h-h! (*backs to writing-table chair and drops into it, speechless*)

ARCHIE. (*looks at PEGGY, pulls his moustache, then looks at the ceiling and coughs*) Er—h'm-m-m!

PEGGY. (*looking round at them all*) Why, what's the matter? What have I said?

ARCHIE. (*rising and crossing L.*) H'm, well, it's not exactly what you've *said*, that wants explaining a bit, it's—

JIMMY. (*breaking in impatiently*) Oh, don't talk rot. Look here, *I'm* responsible for Miss O'Mara's presence here, so she's not called upon to explain *anything*, to anybody.

PEGGY. (*puzzled and perfectly innocently*) But why shouldn't I explain? I've done nothing wrong.

JIMMY. (*staggered*) Why—do you *wish* to tell them?

PEGGY. Of course I do, it's simple enough. (*turning to LADY CRACKENTHORPE and ARCHIE*) I came here last night to see Jimmy, and he hadn't come home. I hadn't anywhere else to go, so his man let me come in and wait. I was awfully tired and I fell

asleep. When the man woke me up, it was too late for me to go anywhere else, so I just stayed here, and slept on that sofa, and Jimmy came back this morning. There's nothing much in all that.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*drily*) No,—hardly enough, I'm afraid.

JIMMY. (*frowning*) These are only the bare facts, of course.

ARCHIE. (*more puzzled than ever*) But, look here, if you came up to town yesterday to marry Jimmy—(*turning to JIMMY*)—where the deuce were you?

JIMMY. I was called away suddenly on Ceylon business, early in the morning.

ARCHIE. (*his face lighting*) Oh! Now I begin to see daylight. Why then, the weddin's only been put off. You'll fix it up to-day,—what?

PEGGY. (*decidedly*) No. We're not going to be married, at all.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*rising and coming down c.*) Not? But what about your letter to Anthony? Your wire to your mother?

PEGGY. (*suddenly realizing that to explain she'll have to expose her plot*) Well, I—it was—I—— (*sticks and looks appealingly to JIMMY*)

JIMMY. (*coming to her rescue*) Miss O'Mara decided to marry me, and changed her mind, that's all.

(PEGGY looks gratefully at JIMMY.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*furiously*) But it's scandalous. We've told people. (*crosses to fireplace*)

ARCHIE. (*crossing down to extreme R., ruefully looking at "Morning Post"*) Ya-as, by Jove, and stuck it in the paper, too. What the deuce will Saunders of the *Morning Post* think o' me? Seems to me, I'm going to look like a fool. (*looks at PEGGY*) What the deuce can I tell 'em?

PEGGY. Oh, don't ask me. You put it in. (*shaking her head at him*) You know it's rather a mistake to describe things that haven't happened, before they do,—in case they don't. (*with this parting shot PEGGY turns her back and goes up stage, glancing at her mother's letter*)

ARCHIE. (*staring at the fatal paragraph, pulling his moustache and muttering*) Dash it all!

PEGGY. (*crossing up to window, and speaking to JIMMY as she goes*) Jimmy, may I speak to you for a minute? I want to show you something.

(*PEGGY sits on window seat, and JIMMY follows her and sits beside her. She shows him her mother's letter, and they talk in dumb show.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*crossing R. to ARCHIE, and touching him on shoulder*) Archie, Archie.

ARCHIE. (*looking up from "Morning Post," which he is studying carefully*) Eh—what?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*glancing over her shoulder at JIMMY and PEGGY, and dropping her voice*) We're just where we were!

ARCHIE. What are you drivin' at?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*in a rapid undertone*)

If they're not married, she's free to go back to Hawk-hurst.—Anthony—can't you see?

ARCHIE. (*throwing down paper on settee R.*) Oh, the devil!

(JIMMY rises from window seat and comes down R. C.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*flurried*) We must do something at once. *Whatever* happens she *must* marry Jimmy now. We must—— (*catching sight of JIMMY coming towards them and breaking off*) Hsh!

JIMMY. (*joining them at table*) Well, one thing's certain, Uncle Archie, we must have that paragraph contradicted at once.

ARCHIE. (*looking at LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Lord, yes, dear feller, of course.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Nonsense, Archie. (*to JIMMY*) Such a thing would be fatal now.

JIMMY. (*turning in surprise*) Fatal?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*quietly*) To Miss O'Mara.

PEGGY. (*hearing this and coming down to C.*) Why?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*with a glitter in her eyes*) Well, if we contradict that paragraph, we should have to tell *your* story, you know.

PEGGY. Why not?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*staring at PEGGY in mock astonishment*) Why not? . . . Do you suppose for a moment that anybody would believe it?

PEGGY. (*rather taken aback*) Why shouldn't they?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*shrugging her shoulders*) Oh, if you think they would, and are prepared to risk

it——(*she turns and goes up to writing-table and sits*).

PEGGY. (*looking first at ARCHIE, then at JIMMY, L. C.*) What? Do you mean any one would actually think that—that—— (*she breaks off and looks at JIMMY and ARCHIE*)

(ARCHIE coughs. Both avoid her eyes and shuffle uncomfortably.)

PEGGY. Oh-h-h! Jimmy, you don't think people would imagine——

JIMMY. (*gravely*) I'm afraid I do. Supposing that, by some accident, any one had happened to see you here, in the small hours, for instance——

PEGGY. Well, some one did, if it comes to that.

(*They all stare at PEGGY astonished.*)

ARCHIE. (*gives a low whistle*) Whew!

JIMMY. (*crossing to c.—alarmed*) You don't really mean that, do you?

PEGGY. Yes.

JIMMY. (*groaning*) Good Lord, you never told me that.

PEGGY. No, I forgot. It was nothing. About two o'clock, I woke up suddenly and heard some one fumbling with a latchkey at the outer door. I thought it was you trying to get in, and that your man had locked up.

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE rises at back and listens.)

JIMMY. (*advancing to PEGGY*) Well, well——?

PEGGY. So I jumped off the sofa, went out, opened

the door, and found myself face to face with Mrs. Colquhoun.

(There is a chorus of dismay.)

| | | | |
|---------|---|-------------------|------------------|
| LADY C. | } | <i>(together)</i> | Mrs. Colquhoun ! |
| JIMMY. | | | That woman ! |
| ARCHIE. | | | Oh, Lord ! |

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE drops into chair again.

ARCHIE crosses up to L. upper corner and back again, agitatedly slapping his leg with newspaper.)

JIMMY. *(anxiously, to PEGGY)* Well ? Well ? . . .
Go on.

PEGGY. Well, we were both so startled that neither of us spoke for a minute, and then she drawled out something about having got to the wrong flat, stared at me as though she'd never seen me in her life before, and floated down the stairs without another word.

JIMMY. Perhaps she didn't recognize you.

PEGGY. Oh, of course she did. I was dead under the electric light.

JIMMY. But didn't you attempt to—to explain things ?

PEGGY. No, I was so astonished. Besides, I expect I was half asleep, and that woman always does paralyse me, even when I'm awake.

(JIMMY throws up his hands in despair and crosses R. to table.)

ARCHIE. But what on earth was she doin' *here* ?

JIMMY. (*dropping into chair R. C. near table*) She's staying in the flat below, with that Howard woman.

ARCHIE. Mary Howard? By Jove, she's a scorcher.

JIMMY. (*groaning*) I know, there's a pair of 'em,—they tear everybody to pieces. Oh, of all the infernal luck! (*smites table with fist*)

PEGGY. There's nothing to make a fuss about. I shall simply go down and see them, and tell them the truth.

JIMMY. (*rising, shaking his head*) No, no, you couldn't. They're not used to it. They wouldn't recognize it. They might believe a good lie, but the truth,—*this* truth,—no. You'd make things worse and worse. (*crosses to window at back agitatedly*)

(*Enter LUCAS. He is carrying a huge basket of flowers with a big hoop handle tied up with enormous bows of white satin ribbon.*)

LUCAS. (*announcing*) The Honourable Mrs. Colquhoun. (*stands back to allow her to pass him*)

(*Enter HON. MRS. COLQUHOUN. She is a tall, elegant, perfectly dressed woman, with a superbly languid manner, and a lazy, perfectly bred drawl. She patronizes and chills everybody with a bored stare through half-closed eyes. She is able to use slang in the grand manner.*)

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*nodding to PEGGY*) How d'ye do, Mrs. Keppel? (*to LUCAS, as she passes him,*

nodding to basket of flowers in his hand) You can put that down.

(LUCAS follows her, and places basket of flowers on table R., places chair for her R. C., and retires.)

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*sailing slowly across*) Hope I'm not disturbin' things. (*just touching PEGGY's hand*) Mornin', Jimmy. (*nodding lazily to him*) Oh, how are you, Lady Crackenthorpe? (*just touching her fingers and nodding casually to ARCHIE*) You here too, Major?—Quite a family gatherin'. (*she has managed in this one minute to make everybody look awkward and uncomfortable. She surveys them and smiles*) It's all right,—'shan't be long. (*to PEGGY*) D'you mind if I "squat" a minute? I do bar standin'. (*sits and unfurls a fan, and fans herself deliberately*) Goin' to be a reg'lar scorcher to-day. (*turning to PEGGY with a lazy smile*) 'Saw that interestin' little paragraph in the *Morning Post*,—at least my maid read it out to me,—so, I just dropped in to wish you both luck, don't y'know. Hadn't an idea, or I'd ha' sent the usual fish slice, or somethin', so I've just brought up the flowers there (*nodding in direction of basket on table*)—to be goin' on with. Hope you'll both accept 'em.

(*There is a moment's awkward pause.*)

PEGGY. (*stammering clumsily*) N-no, I—we—we can't.

(N.B.—*From this moment, all through the following scene, both JIMMY and ARCHIE, as well as PEGGY,*

make repeated attempts to break in as though to explain, but MRS. COLQUHOUN talks straight on without heeding them. In short, her scene is like a monologue with interruptions.)

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*perfectly unmoved*) Really! (*turns and stares languidly at PEGGY*) Why?

PEGGY. (*getting more and more confused under her calm gaze*) Well, I—we—well—we simply can't, that's all.

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*easily*) Oh, I know. You're annoyed about last night, I remember now, vague idea I was a bit short with you on the stairs,—'bit startlin', don't y'know, to see you in Jimmy's flat, in the small hours.

JIMMY. (*attempting to speak*) Yes, but you see——

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*cutting him short*) 'Didn't even know you were engaged, you see. 'Stupid of me to be surprised,—especially nowadays,—'fancy my nerves were a bit jumpy,—'been havin' a rocky evenin' at bridge, so I suppose I *was* a bit unsympathetic,—(*smoothly to PEGGY*)—*was* I?

PEGGY. (*getting more and more paralysed, but makin' an effort to assert herself*) Yes, but it wasn't that I——

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*completely ignoring her and going calmly on*) 'Course, directly my maid read out that you were *married* to Jimmy, I tumbled to it all, in a minute.

(ARCHIE and JIMMY look at each other.)

PEGGY. (*making a feeblor effort*) But—but—if you'll only listen——

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*cutting through her, deliberately*) 'Awf'ly sorry,—'was a bit stupid of me. Mary Howard said so—that is—when she'd read the *Mornin' Post*.

ARCHIE. (*attempting to speak*) Yes, but *that* was *my*——

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*ignoring his attempt to explain*) But she'd ha' thought just the same herself—anybody would. (*dismissing the subject and nodding towards the basket of flowers*) Nice lilies, ain't they? So glad you like them.

PEGGY. (*desperately*) But—I want to explain——

MRS. COLQUHOUN. Don't. The *Mornin' Post* did that. 'Can't be anything else to say,—besides, I loathe explanations, mine's bored me horribly. (*turning to JIMMY*) By the way, never congratulated *you*, Jimmy,—'always forgettin' somethin'. That reminds me, d'you mind touchin' that bell? 'Must be movin', really. (*rises*).

(JIMMY crosses and rings bell and crosses back R.)

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*to LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Congratulate *you*, too, Lady Crackenthorpe. (*nodding towards PEGGY*) Charmin' girl. You keepin' pretty fit, Major?

ARCHIE. (*shortly*) Quite, thanks.

(*Enter LUCAS who holds door open.*)

MRS. COLQUHOUN. (*drawling lazily as she goes*)

Don't move anybody,—'shan't bore you all by shakin' hands,—much too hot. (*turns at door and nods easily to them all*). Bring her to see me, before you sail, Jimmy. 'Bye, everybody.

(*She sails out tranquilly, leaving them all too paralysed to speak, and LUCAS follows her out and closes the door*)

(*They all remain simply speechless for a moment, and then the storm bursts, and they all speak in rapid succession, in furious tones*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Purring cat!

ARCHIE. That woman makes me—— (*cannot find words to express himself*) She—she—— (*with a sudden explosion*) Damn! (*looks round*) Sorry—but it had to come out.

PEGGY. (*crossing quickly to table R., and seizing the basket of flowers*) Oh-h-h! The—the—— (*is about to hurl them at door, but JIMMY stops her*)

JIMMY. (*stopping PEGGY, and taking the basket of flowers from her*) What's all this about? What's wrong?

PEGGY. Why, isn't *everything* wrong?

JIMMY. (*joyfully*) No! Everything's right. It's simply splendid! (*he puts basket of flowers on floor, near back wall*)

(*They all turn and stare at him in amazement.*)

ARCHIE. Eh—what?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. What's splendid?

JIMMY. (*picking up "Morning Post" from settee R., and flourishing it*) Why, we're safe from her. This paragraph has saved us. By Jove, it's unique. A compromising situation like this, and no one putting a wrong construction on it.

ARCHIE. (*whistling*) Phew! By Jove, you're right. What price my paragraph now, my dear feller?

JIMMY. (*excitedly*) It's the luckiest fluke you've ever made.

ARCHIE. (*indignantly*) Fluke? Dash it all! That's a nice way to speak of the inspiration that's saved the show.

PEGGY. (*sitting down on chair R. C., and facing ARCHIE and JIMMY*) I don't know what on earth you two are talking about. We can't leave things like this.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*up stage C., quietly*) No, of course not.

PEGGY. (*turning to her*) Then what are we to do?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. There's only one thing to be done. You must marry Jimmy, of course.

PEGGY. (*startled for a moment, and then impatiently*) Oh, that's absurd!

ARCHIE. (*sitting down on settee, R.*) Not a bit. Why, dash it all, there couldn't be an easier way out of it.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*coming C.*) It's the only way out of it. (*to PEGGY*) You said you were going

to marry him. From the *Morning Post* all the people we know think you are married to him. You can see what a scandal that Colquhoun woman will stir up if you *don't* marry him. So—well,—*marry* him, and make an end of it.

PEGGY. (*looking at JIMMY, and then facing audience—petulantly*) But I don't want to.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Why? (*pause*) You did yesterday. (*pause*) Have you quarrelled? (*pause*) What's happened to make you change your mind so suddenly?

JIMMY. (*down extreme R., decidedly*) Look here, mater, this is our affair, so be good enough to leave us to settle it.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*drawing herself up*) Oh, really. Perhaps you'd prefer us to go?

JIMMY. Well, to be quite candid about it, I should.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*turning, with offended dignity*) Oh!—Come, Archie!

ARCHIE. (*rising and crossing up to writing-table, picks up hat and follows LADY CRACKENTHORPE to door*) Here, wait a bit, Charlotte. (*to JIMMY*) What the deuce are we to say to people?

JIMMY. (*looking at PEGGY and then speaks.*) Come back in half an hour and I'll tell you.

ARCHIE. Oh, well! (*turns at door*) Ye know, we must pull this thing straight, somehow—for the good o' the fam'ly.

(*Exit L., leaving door open. JIMMY crosses and shuts it, and stands looking at PEGGY from back of settee, L.*)

PEGGY. (*a little out of temper—to JIMMY*) I wonder *you* didn't join in the family chorus, and insist on me marrying you.

(*JIMMY doesn't speak for a minute. She looks round at him.*)

You're very quiet about it all.

JIMMY. (*quietly*) What can I say? I'm in a delicate position. I don't want to take advantage of the fix you're in, by trying to rush you in marrying me, against your will.

PEGGY. (*still rather vicious*) Oh, I thought perhaps you'd changed your mind, and didn't want to.

JIMMY. Oh, if you take that tone, I will join what you call the family chorus. There's a lot to be said for it. It seems the logical way out of it. You see, it isn't as though you'd any special objection to me,—at least, you've never said so.

PEGGY. (*turning, softened*) You know I haven't. Why, you're the only real man friend I've ever made.

JIMMY. (*coming round end of settee to c.*) Well then, as you don't dislike me——

PEGGY. (*rising and impulsively*) That's just it, it might be easier if I did, but I like you too much to marry you without liking you more.

JIMMY. (*sits with a sigh on small table L. c., and leans over back of chair near it*) Oh, "the little more, and how much it is." Everything else seems to play into our hands. This berth in England, with a jolly house, and everything. Then you could have stuck

this yarn into a novel. (*whimsically*) People might have believed it—in a book. But if you feel like that (*sighs*)—well, there it is.

PEGGY. (*impulsively and gratefully*) What a brick you are to take it all like this, Jimmy.

JIMMY. Like what?

PEGGY. Do you think I can't see? You take that tone to make me feel easy about it. (*impulsively*) Oh, you *do* make me feel a beast!

JIMMY. (*gently*) No, no, *you* can't help it.

PEGGY. (*suddenly crossing to him and sitting on chair he holds, and looking up at him*) Jimmy, I'll try to help it. I will, really.

JIMMY. (*leaning forward eagerly*) Peggy——

ARCHIE. (*off*) That's all right, I'll just go in.

(JIMMY and PEGGY fall apart as MAJOR ARCHIE bursts unceremoniously into the room, excited and very much out of breath. PEGGY rises and backs to chair R. C.)

ARCHIE. (*coming C., breathlessly*) 'Just spotted what you two have been quarrellin' about, by Jove! (*puffing*) 'Saw it all in a flash. (*excitedly, to PEGGY*) Jimmy's evidently made a hash of it. (*puffing*) I'll own up. *I'm* the really guilty chap. 'Fact,—honour bright,—the whole thing was my idea.

JIMMY. (*rising, with a puzzled frown*) What on earth——?

ARCHIE. (*coaxingly to PEGGY*) Besides, dash it all, you got your revenge, you know.

PEGGY. (*puzzled*) My revenge?

ARCHIE. (*cocking his head, knowingly*) Ya-as. You made Jimmy fall genuinely in love with you in the end, didn't you—what? So, come now, even if he *were* only pretending at first——

JIMMY. (*coming down on ARCHIE'S L., and hissing*) Stop!

PEGGY. (*staring at ARCHIE and repeating*) “Pretending”?

JIMMY. (*hissing angrily at ARCHIE*) You fool!

ARCHIE. (*surprised*) Eh—what?

PEGGY. (*repeating in a low voice*) Pretending. Only pretending at first. (*turning to JIMMY*) What does he mean?

(JIMMY looks troubled and hesitates.)

ARCHIE. (*startled, staring at her, and then sharply to JIMMY*) What? Haven't you told her? (*seeing his mistake*) Good Lord, I thought it was that you'd quarrelled about. (*stammers*) 'Pon my soul, I did. Oh, dash it all. I——

JIMMY. (*sharply*) You've said enough. (*crosses up R. behind ARCHIE*)

PEGGY. (*looking at JIMMY and shrinking back*) Jimmy, you can't mean—it's true?

JIMMY. (*coming down R. c.*) No. That is—not altogether. Look here, let me explain.

PEGGY. That means it *is* true. (*turns away with an angry exclamation*) Oh!

ARCHIE. (*breaking in*) That's just what I was

goin' to tell you. It was *my* idea. I suggested it to Charlotte and——

PEGGY. (*getting more angry every minute*) So Lady Crackenthorpe was in this, too? I might have guessed that. (*turning on JIMMY*) And *you* helped them? (*almost crying in her rage*) Oh, how could you? How could you? (*crosses up to writing-table and standing back to audience.*)

JIMMY. (*following her*) No, wait,—listen.

PEGGY. (*wheeling round with flashing eyes*) Why, what had I done to you all? (*to ARCHIE*) What had I done to *you*?

ARCHIE. (*shamefacedly*) Eh?—oh—er—nothing of course.

PEGGY. (*indignantly*) Then why did you do it? You couldn't invent such a horrid scheme as a joke.

ARCHIE. (*ashamed, hastily*) No, no, dash it all, I—we thought that you—that is, that Anthony—well, ye see, it was to prevent——

PEGGY. You needn't go on. I see the whole thing now. (*she turns and sits at writing-table with her back to audience*)

(*ARCHIE stands twirling his hat, looking rather ashamed.*)

JIMMY. (*R., curtly to him*) You needn't wait.

ARCHIE. (*looking up and clearing his throat*) Here, dash it all, my dear feller, you surely don't think——

JIMMY. (*cutting him short*) I think you'd better go.

ARCHIE. Eh—what? (*indignant and injured*) If this is all the thanks I get, by Jove, I will go. (*crossing up to door, and turning disgustedly*) And *this* is all a feller gets for doin' things for the good o' the fam'ly.

(*He goes out L. disgustedly, leaving the door open.*)

(PEGGY *sits with her back to JIMMY, who crosses, closes door, and stands L. of PEGGY.*)

JIMMY. Now we can have this thing out, and I can explain.

PEGGY. (*with her back turned*) You can “pretend” to explain, you mean.

JIMMY. (*leaning over her*) No. Look here, you don't understand——

PEGGY. (*suddenly rising and wheeling round with blazing eyes*) No, I *don't* understand. I never *shall* understand how you could have anything to do with such a nasty, mean, horrid scheme.

JIMMY. I tell you I'd never seen you——

PEGGY. (*furiously*) There! You admit it. You agreed to make a fool of a girl you'd never even seen.

JIMMY. Oh, will you let me——?

PEGGY. (*refusing to listen and crossing to fireplace*) It's no use trying to get out of it, now.

JIMMY. (*coming down to back of settee*) I'm not, but if you'll only listen a moment.

PEGGY. (*unreasonable in her fury, back to fireplace*) I *won't* listen. I see now why you didn't join in the

“family chorus.” Of course, you wanted to back out of it, when it came to the point.

JIMMY. That’s not true.

PEGGY. What *is* true? (*sits on settee, L.*) What about you trying over and over again to make me believe you wanted to marry me?

JIMMY. (*over back of settee*) I swear to you, that, after that first half-hour when we met—I’ve never said a single word to you that I didn’t mean.

PEGGY. (*with a scornful laugh*) “After that first half-hour.” (*contemptuously*) I wonder you couldn’t invent something better than that. (*rises and crosses to R. C.*)

JIMMY. Do you mean to say you don’t believe me?

PEGGY. (*facing him with blazing eyes*) No! How can you expect me to after a thing like this? (*stamping her foot*) No, I *don’t* believe you, and now that you know what I think of you, I’ll go. (*crosses up to writing-table, picks up hat, and moves towards door*)

JIMMY. (*standing between her and the door*) Stop! Do you think I’m going to let you go like this?

PEGGY. (*on the edge of tears*) You can’t stop me. I’m going.

(*She makes a movement forward, but JIMMY takes her hat from her, and throws it down on small table L. C.*)

JIMMY. (*firmly*) Not before you’ve listened to me. I’ve told you the absolute truth to-day. And you’ve

got to believe it. (*setting his teeth determinedly*)
You shall believe it.

PEGGY. (*attempting to pass and pick up her hat*)
Will you let me pass, please?

JIMMY. (*preventing her from taking it*) What are
you going to do?

PEGGY. I'm going to tell the truth.

JIMMY. About last night?

PEGGY. (*defiantly*) Yes.

JIMMY. Then I *shan't* let you go.

PEGGY. (*indignantly*) What? (*her breath comes
in short sobs and she begins to cry*)

JIMMY. I'm not going to let you do a mad thing
in a fit of temper, that you'd be sorry for, all your life.

PEGGY. (*through her tears*) That's *my* business.

JIMMY. (*quietly*) No; you forget, it's my busi-
ness, since yesterday. You made it so.

PEGGY. That's past and done with.

JIMMY. No, it's not done with. (*firmly*) You
trusted me enough to put yourself in my hands yester-
day, and until this thing blows over, you've got to
leave yourself there.

PEGGY. (*still giving short sobs, and wiping her eyes*)
I shall do nothing of the kind. I'm going to mother,
and people can think what they like about me,—I
don't care. (*picks up hat from table and makes
another move L.*)

JIMMY. (*putting his hand on hers, and stopping her*)
Your mother will care, though. What about her?
(*pause*)

(PEGGY stops dead, and then backs a little, c.)

(following her) Besides, directly this scandal begins about you,—as it will,—it's "good-bye" to her chance of ever being Lady Crackenthorpe. You are not the only person who's going to suffer by this.

(PEGGY turns her face sharply away, and stands trying to control her tears, face to audience.)

JIMMY. You know what I say is true. I can see you do. I tell you, you can't do this thing.

PEGGY. (*stands baffled for a moment, and then suddenly turning and crossing to table R.*) Very well. Then there's only one other thing to do,—we must leave things as they are, that's all. (*flings her hat and gloves on to lower end of settee R., and sits defiantly on chair R. C.*)

JIMMY. (*C., staring at her*) Leave things as they are?

PEGGY. Yes. Let people go on thinking that we're married.

JIMMY. (*startled*) What? . . . Oh, impossible! We—we can't.

PEGGY. Yes, we can. *I* can, and I'm going to do it.

JIMMY. Nonsense!

PEGGY. (*determinedly*) Yes, I am, and you are going to help me. (*rising and crossing to JIMMY and looking up at him*) You *must* help me. It's the least you can do, after what you have done. You can't

refuse. You owe it to me. I—I claim it of you. I insist. (*stamps her foot*)

JIMMY. (*frowning a moment, and then shrugging his shoulders*) Oh, very well then, there's nothing more to be said. (*turns up stage to writing-table*)

(*The telephone bell rings off R.*)

JIMMY. The telephone. That'll probably be Jack Menzies, asking for our decision. Now I can tell him that I'm going back to Ceylon. (*crosses R. above chair at head of table*)

PEGGY. (*startled, and crossing R. below table to settee*) Going back to Ceylon? Why should you?

JIMMY. (*quietly*) Well, we can't very well pretend we're married, if I stay here. (*crosses to door R. and opens it*)

PEGGY. (*kneeling on settee R. and leaning over back*) But—Jack Menzies' offer?

JIMMY. I shall refuse it.

PEGGY. (*leaning over and catching hold of his sleeve*) You'll never throw away such a splendid chance as that?

(*Telephone rings again.*)

JIMMY. (*quietly*) Of course. (*repeating her words*) "It's the least I can do,"—remember. "I owe it to you," you know. (*PEGGY is about to speak. JIMMY stops her and removes her hand from his arm, and ends firmly*) No,—I "*insist.*"

(*JIMMY exits R., and closes door behind him.*)

(PEGGY stretches out her hands to the closed door, as if to call him back, and then slowly turns, and seems on the edge of breaking down again when the door L. opens. Enter LUCAS, L.)

LUCAS. (announcing) Mr. Menzies.

(Enter JACK MENZIES.)

(Exit LUCAS.)

PEGGY. (giving a relieved cry and springing up) Oh! I am so glad you've come. (she comes to C. and stands close to him, speaking breathlessly) Mr. Menzies, Jimmy says he's going back to Ceylon.

JACK. (incredulously) No!

PEGGY. (rushing on excitedly) Yes, he's in there (pointing to door R.), telephoning to you about it, now. It was my fault. I rushed him into it,—but, don't let him go. (tearfully and imploringly) Promise me you won't let him go.

JACK. (puzzled) But, look here, Mrs. Keppel, I'm a bit fogged——

PEGGY. (breaking in hastily) There isn't time to explain it all. (looking round apprehensively at door R.) Jimmy will be back in a minute. He—(she brushes some tears from her eyes)—he's behaved abominably, but I can't let him lose this chance, and go back to Ceylon on my account, so, promise me that you'll stop him.

JACK. (frowning uncomfortably) How can I? (smoothing his hat awkwardly) Seems to me you're

the only person who can do that. Surely there must be *something* you can do, to stop him?

PEGGY. (*turns face to audience, thinking for a moment, and then her face suddenly lights up and she exclaims*) Yes—there is,—and I'll do it. (*she turns hastily to table, snatches up her hat and begins to fix it on and pin it hurriedly, as she crosses abruptly towards door L.*)

JACK. (*watching her, puzzled*) Here, wait a bit, Mrs. Keppel,—where are you going?

PEGGY. (*turning*) I'm going straight to Hawkhurst.

JACK. (*wonderingly*) Hawkhurst?

PEGGY. (*determinedly*) Yes. (*she crosses hastily R. again, and snatches up her gloves from table, and then goes up to JACK, and with her eyes filling with tears, speaks in a shaky voice*) Oh, Mr. Menzies, I've made such a horrible muddle of everything, but I'm not going to let Jimmy suffer for it, so tell him that he's free to take your offer, and stay here, and—(*her voice trembles, and after a little choke she adds*)—and—marry anybody he likes.

JACK. (*staggered*) And—what?

PEGGY. (*in a low, shaky voice*) He never wanted to marry me,—he was only—(*with another choke*)—pretending. (*she dashes the tears from her eyes and pulls herself together*) Tell him I'll never forgive him. (*turning to go L.*) Tell him I—I hate him, but—(*turning back to JACK*)—don't let him go. (*turning L. again, and speaking determinedly through her tears*)

He shan't go. I won't *let* him go; so whatever happens, and whatever people think of me, I'm going to tell the truth. (*she crosses hastily to L. as curtain falls*)

VERY QUICK CURTAIN.

END OF SECOND ACT.

ACT III.

SCENE.—*Same as ACT I., only settee is now placed obliquely with its back against piano, facing down towards R. C.*

(ANTHONY, MRS. O'MARA and MILLICENT are discovered. ANTHONY is seated at table C., squinting down microscope, surrounded by a litter of specimen boxes, books, etc. MRS. O'MARA is sitting opposite him, with a big book. MILLICENT is standing between table and door R., hat on, just turning to staircase.)

MILLICENT. Still no news of Peggy, I suppose Mrs. O'Mara?

MRS. O'MARA. Not a word, my dear. But there, when a gyurl's on her honeymoon——(*shrugs her shoulders good-naturedly*) Aw, we'll be hearin' from Paris in the morning, I'm thinkin'.

ANTHONY. (*looking up—impatiently*) Yes—yes—yes. No doubt,—so, don't let us detain you, Milly.

MILLICENT. (*surveying them*) You don't look as though I shall be very much in the way if I *stayed*.

ANTHONY. (*oblivious of her meaning—testily*) Tut, tut, tut! Can't you see—(*waving his hand towards MRS. O'MARA and microscope*)—we are—*engaged*?

MILLICENT. (*laughing*) “Engaged”—why you

look as though you were married. (*turns to staircase and runs up*)

ANTHONY. (*turns sharply and watches her going up*) Eh? M-m? (*looks inquiringly at MRS. O'MARA*)

MILLICENT. (*leaning over balustrade*) You know the Hall is never any good for engaged couples, Anthony.

ANTHONY (*turning to MILLICENT*) Why not? Why not?

MILLICENT. Well, with three doors and a staircase, you're bound to find it "jumpy."

(*She laughs and runs off L.*)

ANTHONY. (*turning to MRS. O'MARA*) "Jumpy?"—What does she mean, Kitty?—M-m?

MRS. O'MARA. (*looking at him comically*) 'Deed, an' it's plain ye were never engaged before, Anthony.

ANTHONY. (*emphatically*) No,—never.—Never! You see.—(*he hesitates, gives a nervous laugh and then uses her name*)—er—Kitty, no woman ever understood me, until I met you. (*puts out hand to take hers nervously and awkwardly, gives her hand an abrupt squeeze and then turns embarrassed to microscope*). H'm—would you mind reading out the description, while I—(*squints down and adjusts sight of microscope*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*shrugs her shoulders good-humouredly, and reads aloud from book she is holding*) "The most marked characteristic of the female is an irregu-

lar arrangement of bristles, on the anterior pair of legs."

ANTHONY. (*excitedly — gazing down microscope*) Ah, excellent! I can see them. (*looks up and beams delightedly at MRS. O'MARA*) Then it is a female! What a delightful time we're having—eh? (*dives his head abruptly down to microscope again, and squints down it, exclaiming enthusiastically*) It's ideal! My microscope, you helping me, and a well-developed spider,—it—it's intoxicating!

MRS. O'MARA. (*with a half-comic, half-hopeless glance at him, and then speaking pointedly and significantly*) Aw, yes—ut's always an intoxicating toime,—the courtin'.

ANTHONY. (*still squinting down the microscope*) Quite—quite! (*absorbed in the spider*) There are the bristles—one, two, three——

MRS. O'MARA. (*sticking to it*) An' to think av ye avoidin' ut so long, now, Anthony.

ANTHONY. (*looking up*) Eh? Oh, yes, yes. (*again squinting down*) But then you see I never dreamt that courtship could be so—— (*he looks up abruptly*) Well, is *all* courting like this?

MRS. O'MARA. (*with a smile—drily*) Well, no, Anthony, most courtin' is a thrifle different.

ANTHONY. (*triumphantly*) Ah! I thought as much. (*meditatively, as he squints down microscope*) Now, I wonder how other engaged couples manage to spend their time?

MRS. O'MARA. Well, part of their toime—(*rises*

and goes round behind him, and with her hand on his shoulder, very gently kisses him on the cheek)—that way, Anthony darlin'.

ANTHONY. (*starting as though he'd been shot*) Eh? (*very embarrassed*) Yes—yes—of course. H'm,—why not—why not? (*he turns as though he were going to kiss her, laughs nervously, and ends by ducking down his head over microscope to hide his confusion, and mutters*) It is a female, there's no doubt about it.

(MRS. O'MARA *stands for a moment with her hand on his shoulder, watching him with an affectionate smile, and then pats his shoulder and turns away, and as she does so, PEGGY is seen peering in through window under balcony at the back.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*uttering a little cry of surprise*) Oh! (*she stifles it immediately as PEGGY outside motions her to be silent, and beckons to her*)

ANTHONY. (*turning to MRS. O'MARA*) Eh? Did you——?

MRS. O'MARA. (*flurried, with a look towards window*) No—no—'twas nothing, I—er—I've just remembered something. I—it's in the garden.

ANTHONY. (*rising*) Oh, let me fetch it.

MRS. O'MARA. (*hastily pushing him back into his chair*) No, no—I—I'll be back directly.

ANTHONY. Oh, well, if you're quite sure——(*turns to his microscope and squints down*)

(MRS. O'MARA, *keeping her eye on him, steals up stage and out through door under landing, and joins PEGGY and disappears with her.*)

(*Enter MILLICENT on landing. She looks over and gives a quick glance round.*)

MILLICENT. (*on landing*) Are you alone, Anthony?

ANTHONY. (*turning*) Eh? Yes, yes,—for the moment.

MILLICENT. (*coming down*) The carriage has gone to fetch mother and Uncle Archie from the station. They'll be here directly.

ANTHONY. (*rising hastily*) Good gracious! (*stands, looking alarmed*)

MILLICENT. (*R. of C. table*) Have you decided how to break the news to mother?

ANTHONY. Well, no—not exactly. Millicent, you don't think the news of my engagement to Mrs. O'Mara will be a *very* great shock to her, do you?

MILLICENT. (*mischievously*) I think an earthquake would be a trifle to it.

ANTHONY. (*backing hastily to staircase*) Then in that case I'm quite sure that it would be only kind to mother to postpone the announcement until after dinner. (*hurries up the staircase*)

MILLICENT. That means that *I* shall be left to tell her. (*follows him upstairs*) Stop, Anthony, come back.

(ANTHONY *disappears through archway, and* MILLICENT *hurries after him.*)

Mother must be told directly she comes, so——

(*She disappears through archway* L. *after him.*)

(*Enter* PEGGY *through door at back under balcony, wearing dress she wore in* ACT II. *She comes in cautiously, looks round, and making sure no one is there, goes back—re-enter with* MRS. O'MARA, *who holds handkerchief to her eyes. PEGGY has her arm round her mother's shoulders, and leads her tenderly forward.*)

PEGGY. Come and sit down, mother. (*leads her to settee* L. C.) You don't feel as though you're going to faint, do you?

MRS. O'MARA. (*sitting down on settee*) No, no—ut's me heart,—ut's weak anyway. Ut's what ye've just told me. (*hand to her heart*)

PEGGY. (*sitting beside her, and taking her hand in hers*) Mother, don't take it like this.

MRS. O'MARA. (*incredulously*) I—I can't believe ut yet. To stay in Jimmy's rooms all night. That woman to find ye there at one o'clock in the morning. An' when you're not even goin' to marry him. Aw, how could ye do ut, Peggy? How could ye?

PEGGY. But, mother, I haven't done anything wrong?

MRS. O'MARA. (*patting PEGGY's hand*) I know, dearie, I know; but then I'm yer mother,—an' that's why ut hurts. (*distractedly*) To think of people

believin' that me own child was—och ! I can't bear the thought av ut.

PEGGY. (*rising, and looking at her mother, seriously, and speaking in a hard, choking voice*) Then you think that too, mother ?

MRS. O'MARA. Think what, Peggy ?

PEGGY. (*looking in front of her*) That people will say that I—— (*breaks off*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*distractedly*) Aw, they'll think the worst, av course. Small wonder if they do. (*wailing*) What would yer poor father have felt—he'd been here ?

PEGGY. (*suddenly covering her face, and gasping out*) Don't. (*in a broken voice*) I—I did think you'd have stood up for me, mother.

MRS. O'MARA. (*starting*) Peggy ! (*holding out her arms tenderly*) Sure I didn't mean to——

PEGGY. Oh, mother ! (*turns with a sob and buries her face in her mother's shoulder and cries*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*soothing her*) There, there—I didn't mean to hurt you, Peggy, darlin'. I only—oh, ut's beside meself I am, about it all. (*distractedly, as she strokes PEGGY's hair*) What'll we do now ? An' me just engaged to Anthony, too !

PEGGY. (*sitting up, remembering*) Mother, you don't think it will upset all that, do you ?

MRS. O'MARA. I'm sure av ut. Think of Anthony's pride when the scandal about ye is on everybody's tongue. Think how Lady Crackenthorpe will speak of us both to him. She'll make out the

worst, av course, for her own sake. Ye can see how it will end.

PEGGY. (*rises, and stands staring in front of her, speaking in a hopeless voice*) Then I've done it all for nothing

MRS. O'MARA. (*wailing*) Oh, Peggy, Peggy, if only ye'd fallen in love with Jimmy.

PEGGY. (*hesitating, and looking down and then bringing it out with a burst*) Well then, if you must know—I have. (*she turns and sits on chair L. of C. table*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*sitting bolt upright and staring at PEGGY incredulously*) What? Ye have fallen in love with him? (*rising, coming down L. C.*) . . . With Jimmy?

PEGGY. Yes. (*with her back turned—irritably*) Isn't it—disgusting?

MRS. O'MARA. (*puzzled*) Disgustin'! Aw, what is ut ye mean now? (*coming down nearer a little to L. of her*) Why, if ye're in love with him, everything'll be all right.

PEGGY. (*turning in surprise*) How can it be? Good gracious, mother, can't you see what an "impossible" situation it is? Think of it—to go and fall in love with a man who doesn't care a scrap about you—a man who's made a fool of you. Oh, it's humiliating enough for me to know it,—but if he ever found out——

MRS. O'MARA. (*starting*) What? D'ye mean ye're not goin' to let him know?

PEGGY. (*staring at her mother*) Let him know?

(*emphatically*) Never ! If I *have* fallen in love, I still have *some* self-respect.

MRS. O'MARA. (*bewildered*) But if ye've fallen in love with him——? (*throwing up her hands*) Aw, how d'ye explain ut all, Peggy ?

PEGGY. (*impatiently*) I *can't* explain it. It just happened,—all of a sudden,—this afternoon, on my way here. (*with half-comic, half-tearful irritation*) It—it's simply sickening. What's the use of it, now ? Why couldn't it have developed before ? It must have been in my system. I must have been walking about with it for days, without knowing it. (*disgustedly*) And then for it to break out like this—just like a rash,—and in the train, too ! I hid behind my newspaper, but I'm perfectly certain the people in my carriage must have noticed it.

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, be sinsible now, Peggy, ye'll *have* to let him know, for when ye're heart's taken suddenly with the cramp, like that, there's nothing but marriage'll straighten it out again. Ut's the only cure.

PEGGY. Oh, then I shall be a permanent invalid, that's all.

MRS. O'MARA. (*getting annoyed, sarcastically*) Sure an' if ye were goin' to be so obstinate about it, I wonder ye didn't stop it in toime. Ye've written pages and pages about ut, in yer precious stories,—I wonder ye didn't recognize the symptoms.

PEGGY. "Symptoms ?" There aren't any. You seem to begin in the middle of it. I did !

MRS. O'MARA. Then, sure, doesn't that prove he's the right man, anyway?

PEGGY. (*impatiently*) Oh, what *is* the good of the man being the right man, when you know that you are the wrong woman?

MRS. O'MARA. But are we sure ye're right about bein' "wrong"? Is ut likely, now, that any man would be so ready to throw up this splendid chance here, and go back to everything he hated, just to help the crazy scheme of a girl he didn't care for?

PEGGY. He couldn't help himself. I simply rushed him into it.

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, an' he'd have rushed himself *out* of ut, if he *hadn't* cared for ye? Aw, be sinsible, now, Peggy, marry him, ye'll soon find out how right ye are about being the wrong woman, then.

PEGGY. (*ruefully*) Yes, I expect I should!

MRS. O'MARA. Ah! ye know what I mane, now.

PEGGY. Seriously, mother, do you really believe,—after all he's done, that he *can* care for me?—You can't think he really *does* want to marry me?

MRS. O'MARA. Think?—I'm *sure* av ut.

PEGGY. (*smiling in spite of herself*) Mother! (*then slowly facing audience*) I—I can't believe it.

MRS. O'MARA. (*softly*) Try him, Peggy darlin', give him the chance an' see.

PEGGY. (*shaking her head*) It's too late. He'll never ask me again.

MRS. O'MARA. (*coaxingly*) Aw, sure then, couldn't ye just ask him?

PEGGY. (*indignantly*) Mother!

MRS. O'MARA. Listen now. All ye've got to say to him, is that *I* wouldn't *let* ye tell the truth, and that rather than let him go back to Ceylon and ruin his prospects, ye *will* marry him, after all.

PEGGY. Oh! you mean me to consent to it as a marriage of convenience? (*smiling roguishly*) For *his* convenience—of course!

MRS. O'MARA. (*with mock seriousness*) Aw, yes, av course, for *his* convenience, entoirely.

PEGGY. (*with a twinkle in her eye*) Then *I* should be making the sacrifice, shouldn't I?

MRS. O'MARA. (*coughs*) H'm! Well, it would *look* like it, annyway.

PEGGY. (*delightedly*) And then I needn't "give myself away," at all.

MRS. O'MARA. Well, ut depends how ye put it.

PEGGY. Oh! You leave that to me. (*she draws herself up with assumed dignity*) At first I shall be frigid, but generous.

(MRS. O'MARA *laughs*.)

PEGGY. (*her eyes dancing with excitement*) And then I needn't let him find out, what I really feel, until later?

MRS. O'MARA. No. You can melt gradually.

PEGGY. (*nodding*) Yes—about an inch a day,—like a glacier. (*clapping her hands*) I'll do it. (*then suddenly looking almost afraid*) Oh! *I wonder* how he'll take it?

MRS. O'MARA. I don't. I *know*, to a "T."

PEGGY. Why, do you think he'll—— (*she breaks off*)

MRS. O'MARA. He'll just clutch such a chance, with both ar-r-rms,—an' *you* too.

PEGGY. (*impulsively seizing her mother and hugging her*) You—you darling! (*kisses her and then starts*) Oh! that reminds me! (*thinking a moment, then turning abruptly*) Do you suppose he'll remember that *I* kissed *him*, first?

MRS. O'MARA. (*starting*) What? . . . Peggy! How could ye bring ye'self to do such a thing?

PEGGY. There was no "bringing myself" about it. It was a kind of—inspiration. I just did it—all of a sudden. (*an idea striking her*) Mother!

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, what is ut, now?

PEGGY. Why, that's when I must have caught it!

MRS. O'MARA. Caught what?

PEGGY. "Love!" Then it *is* a microbe, after all!

(ANTHONY'S voice is heard off, through archway L. on landing. MRS. O'MARA and PEGGY turn and listen.)

MRS. O'MARA. (*turning to PEGGY—flurried*) Ut's Anthony!

PEGGY. What shall I say to him, mother,—quick.

MRS. O'MARA. Say nothing—say Jimmy's comin' on later—say annything, say—— (*she breaks off*) Hsh—he's here.

(Enter ANTHONY on landing, followed by MILLICENT, they both look down into hall.)

MILLICENT. (*with a surprised cry*) Why, it's Peggy! (*crosses landing and runs downstairs.*)

ANTHONY. (*staring at PEGGY*) Good gracious!

MILLICENT. (*as she runs downstairs, to PEGGY*) What on earth are you doing here?

ANTHONY. (*following her*) Yes—yes—that is precisely the question I was about to ask.

(MRS. O'MARA sits on chair L. of C. table and PEGGY remains standing almost in front of table to R. of it.)

MILLICENT. (*hurrying across to PEGGY*) Where's Jimmy?

PEGGY. (*with a rapid glance over her shoulder at MRS. O'MARA*) He—he's coming on later.

(ANTHONY joins MILLICENT and they both stand to R. of PEGGY.)

MILLICENT. But we thought you were on your honeymoon—in Paris, or somewhere? What's happened?

ANTHONY. Tut, tut! (*coming round below MILLICENT, pushing her aside*) The very question I was about to put. (*importantly adjusting his spectacles*) Er—as the head of the family I feel it my duty to inquire into all this. (*judicially*) Touching yesterday. Er—the point is—(*he doesn't know what he ought to say*)—er—at what hour were you married, precisely?

MILLICENT. (*impatiently, pushing him back*) Oh, what on earth does that matter, Anthony? (*to PEGGY*) Why on earth did you and Jimmy keep it all so dark? I suppose I ought to be "piggish" about it, but I won't be a bit, if you'll only tell me all about it. What did you wear yesterday?

PEGGY. (*hesitating a minute, and then evasively*) Oh—this. (*indicating her frock*) You see, I—I only took what I stood up in. (*leans back against table*)

MILLICENT. (*horrified*) You don't mean to say you were married in that hat and frock?

ANTHONY. (*determined to assert himself, impatiently*) Tut, tut,—there, that will do, Millicent. It can't be of the slightest importance what she was married in. The point is—*where*? (*judicially*) Your wire said the Mount Street Registry Office. Now, why the——?

MILLICENT. (*impatiently, pushing him aside*) Oh, bother the Registry Office! What does it matter which it was? (*to PEGGY*) Why ever didn't you wait, and be married properly, with bridesmaids and a bouquet, and a bishop—and—and all the girls you hated there, grinding their teeth?

ANTHONY. (*pompously, blinking through his spectacles*) Precisely. Why not? Why not? I would have given you away myself, with pleasure.

PEGGY. (*with an odd smile*) Oh, I—gave myself away, thank you.

ANTHONY. (*seriously—adjusting his spectacles*)

Really? Most unusual, surely. I wonder you feel properly married, at all.

PEGGY. (*amused in spite of herself, and smiling again*) Well, I'm not sure that I do, if it comes to that.

MILLICENT. I know *I* shouldn't, without so much as a handful of rice down my back.

(ANTHONY. *again assuming the judicial air*)
Er—I really feel as your future step-father——

MILLICENT. (*pushing him aside*) You're only her brother-in-law yet, Anthony, so let me have a look in. (*to PEGGY*) Really, what made you rush it so?

ANTHONY. (*glaring at MILLICENT through his spectacles*) There! The identical query I was about to put, so—(*turns to PEGGY*)—the question is, what made you—er—why did you—(*ends lamely and feebly*)—er—get married?

PEGGY. (*amused at ANTHONY, and smiling*) Oh, you should ask people that question *beforehand*. Heaps of people can't tell you why they got married, *afterwards*. They don't know themselves.

MILLICENT. (*turning suddenly*) Hsh! I'm almost sure I heard the carriage. (*runs up stage c. and looks out of window under landing at back*)

ANTHONY. (*looking alarmed, and hurrying after her*) The carriage? Is it there? (*looks out of window too*)

PEGGY. (*turning swiftly to MRS. O'MARA*) Mother! Supposing Jimmy has come back with Lady Cracken-

thorpe and the Major? (*glances quickly at the window and then at the door*)

MRS. O'MARA. I never thought av ut. (*rises*)

PEGGY (*flurried*) I—I can't meet him before the others. (*turns up towards staircase*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*crossing R. behind table*) No, no, of course not.

(*They go to stairs and begin to ascend as ANTHONY comes down to stairs and sees them ascending. MILLICENT comes down C. to table.*)

ANTHONY. (*calling up—flurried*) Don't go, Kitty, mother will be here in a moment.

(*PEGGY is now crossing landing.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*hastily*) I—I'll be back directly, Anthony.

(*Exit PEGGY through archway, followed by her mother.*)
(*ANTHONY stands forlorn.*)

MILLICENT. (*laughing*) It's no use, Anthony, you'll have to break it to mother yourself.

ANTHONY. (*getting more flurried and dabbing his forehead with handkerchief*) It seems inevitable. (*walks up C. agitatedly and back again to upper end of table*) It's so difficult to know how to begin.

MILLICENT. Oh, get on to the subject of marriage somehow, and the moment you see a good opening, freeze on to it, and slip it out quickly.

ANTHONY. (*trying to appear calm*) M'm—yes—

quite so, quite so. I suppose you couldn't give me a hint, when the psychical moment arrives? . . . M'm?

MILLICENT. (*R. of him, laughing*) Oh, very well, when I see a good opening, I'll cough and nudge you—like this. (*coughs and digs him in L. ribs*)

ANTHONY. (*wincing, but very serious*) Yes, I see, thank you.

(*PARKER enters L., crosses the stage to open folding doors R., and goes out.*)

ANTHONY. (*in awed tones*) Millicent, they're here. (*gives a wild glance round, and makes a bolt across L.*)

MILLICENT. Anthony, where are you going?

ANTHONY. (*guiltily*) Eh? I—I'm just going to the library—to—to write a letter.

MILLICENT. (*following him*) Nonsense, come back.

ANTHONY. No, really, I must——

(*Bolts through door L., and MILLICENT runs after him calling, "Anthony—Anthony."*)

(*Exit MILLICENT and ANTHONY, L.*)

(*Enter LADY CRACKENTHORPE and MAJOR PHIPPS, both looking bored and weary, followed by PARKER.*

ARCHIE gives his hat to PARKER.)

(*Exit PARKER, L.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*wearily*) Thank goodness we're home at last. (*crosses and dropping into chair near fireplace, L.*)

ARCHIE. (*C., pulling off his gloves*) Ya-as, by

Jove! What a day we've had. An' not to know where we are, at the finish.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*throwing off her lace scarf and taking off her gloves*) I can't understand it. Archie, are you sure you went back to Jimmy's flat a second time?

ARCHIE. (*crossing L.*) Eh—what? Dash it all, Charlotte, what on earth are you driving at?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Oh, I thought you might have forgotten, and gone to—(*meaningly*)—your “dentist's,” instead.

ARCHIE. Well, I did look in, but she—(*hastily correcting himself*)—I mean he—my dentist, y'know—was out, so I went on to Jimmy's.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*crossing to fire and warming her hands*) Then I think it's scandalous of Jimmy and that girl, to disappear without leaving us a message, or anything to say what they were going to do.

ARCHIE. (*sitting on settee, L.*) I'm devilish sore about the whole thing, considerin' I did it all for the good of the family. By the way, Charlotte, what are we to say to 'em here, about this business?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Oh, say nothing at present. Jimmy and that girl may have got married to-day, for all we know. Don't let's make fools of ourselves.

(*Enter ANTHONY at back, L., followed by MILLICENT; they begin to cross to C.*)

ARCHIE. (*not seeing them*) I see. And as soon as you do know, you'll fire this O'Mara woman out, I suppose ?

(ANTHONY stops dead and listens unobserved.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*replying to ARCHIE, unconscious of ANTHONY's presence*) Oh, you leave her to me. What a relief it is to feel Anthony is out of danger, anyhow. If he had entangled himself with these O'Maras, I—well, I couldn't—I wouldn't have suffered it.

(ANTHONY, looking very alarmed, motions MILLICENT to go back, and tiptoes across to staircase, with his eyes fixed apprehensively on the backs of his mother and ARCHIE.)

ARCHIE. Oh, that's all right. Anthony's safe enough.

(ANTHONY has now reached the stairs, MILLICENT silently following him. He gets up three steps, when MILLICENT runs forward on her toes and catches him by the coat-tails, he tries to free himself, loses his balance and slips downstairs with a crash. LADY CRACKENTHORPE and ARCHIE turn and see him and MILLICENT.)

ARCHIE. Hallo, by Jove, it's Anthony. (*rises and crosses to C. table*) You come in deucedly quietly.

ANTHONY. (*sitting on bottom step, rubbing himself and smiling rather foolishly*) Yes, yes.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*rising and advancing L. C.*)
You seemed amused about something, Anthony?

ANTHONY. (*getting up, blinking through his spectacles, very seriously*) Amused? Not in the least, mother—quite the contrary, I assure you. (*crosses to R. C.*)

ARCHIE. (*L. C., puzzled, but assuming a matter-of-fact tone*) Well, Milly, any news since we left?

MILLICENT. (*down R. C.*) Oh yes, a telegram came for you, Uncle Archie; I opened it. It was an appointment for yesterday.

ARCHIE. Eh? (*hastily*) Ya-as, ya-as. It was from my dentist.

MILLICENT. (*looking at him quizzically, her head on one side*) Doesn't it strike you as rather a frivolous name for a dentist—"Topsey"?

ARCHIE. Eh—what? (*he coughs and looks confused*) H'm—er—h'm. (*moves up to piano*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*turning to ANTHONY*)
Oh, the Duncombes were sorry you hadn't gone with us to the wedding, Anthony.

(MILLICENT *coughs and nudges ANTHONY, who, after a glance at her, advances to C.*)

ANTHONY. (*nervously*) Oh—er—by the way, mother, speaking of weddings—I—I—(*he funks it*)—er—the housekeeper tells me we want a new boiler in the kitchen.

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE and ARCHIE *stare at him.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. What on earth's *that* got to do with weddings?

ANTHONY. Eh? Oh—er—(*with a nervous laugh*)—n-nothing, of course, only I—I just thought of it.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*pointing to microscope*) What's all this litter doing down here? Why have you brought them out of the study?

ANTHONY. Oh, my study is being turned out,—in fact, it's being cleaned.

(MILLICENT *follows* ANTHONY *and stands close to R. of him*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*incredulously*) What? Your study turned out? Cleaned?

ARCHIE. (*laughing*) Nonsense, my dear fellow, you're joking.

ANTHONY. On the contrary, I'm quite unusually serious.

(MILLICENT *coughs loudly and nudges him, and he takes a long breath.*)

ANTHONY. Mrs. O'Mara suggested it. The fact is—I—she—I—(*funking again*)—well, it was most necessary.

(*Enter* PARKER, L., *with evening papers, which he places on R. side of table.* ANTHONY *sneaks round to him and whispers excitedly in dumb show, and points upstairs.* PARKER *nods and goes solemnly up the staircase.* *While this is going on,* LADY CRACKENTHORPE *speaks to* MILLICENT.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*advancing to c., suspiciously*) Millicent, what has been happening in my absence?

ARCHIE. (*coming down to R. of table c.*) Yes, something's up. Out with it, Milly.

MILLICENT. [*shrugging her shoulders and laughing*] Oh, you'd better ask Anthony.

(*At this moment ANTHONY rejoins them R. c., near*
MILLICENT.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Anthony, I'm perfectly certain, from your manner, that you've something to tell me.

(MILLICENT nudges ANTHONY and coughs.)

ANTHONY. (*making another effort*) Quite so—quite so,—I—I have, mother; the fact is I—I—(*funking again*)—er—Saunders has given notice. (*looks round at stairs, anxiously*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*sharply*) That's not what you were going to say, Anthony.

ANTHONY. Er—well, no—not exactly. (*laughs abruptly and nervously*)

(MILLICENT nudges him violently, and he takes another long breath.)

No, the fact is—what I really was going to say, was that I—I—I must go and dress for dinner. (*turns hastily to stairs*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*moves to below c. of c. table*) Stop! Anthony, I insist on knowing what is going on.

(*Enter suddenly MRS. O'MARA on landing.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*calling down*) Aw, could ye wait just a few moments, Anthony darlin' ?

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE and ARCHIE look up at her, astounded.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*with a gasp*) What ? . . . Archie ! *What* did she say ?

ANTHONY. (*stumbling up stage and motioning frantically to MRS. O'MARA*) Come down, Kitty, come down.

(MRS. O'MARA comes down.)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*with a cry*) Archie ! Did you hear ? He called her "Kitty." What does it— Oh-h-h ! Am I going mad ? (*crossing distractedly L., followed by ARCHIE*)

ARCHIE. (*in an undertone*) Keep hold of yourself, Charlotte. Dash it all, keep yer head.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*turning*) How can I ? (*coming back to chair L. C., and speaking angrily to MRS. O'MARA, who joins the group*) May I ask what you mean by addressing Lord Crackenthorpe in such a manner ?

MRS. O'MARA. (C., *turning to ANTHONY*) Why, sure, haven't ye told them, Anthony darlin' ?

ANTHONY. (*giving his abrupt laugh*) Er—no. I thought perhaps you might prefer to—to— (*backing to stairs*) If you'll excuse me, I really must go

and dress for dinner. (*turns and shuffles hastily up the staircase*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*turning and calling after him*) Anthony!

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*with almost a scream*) Stop! Anthony, you can't mean—— (*she chokes*)

ANTHONY. (*standing and looking down from landing*) Yes, I do,—really, er—Kitty, and I are—(*gives abrupt laugh*)—engaged!

(*Exits hastily through door L.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*furious*) What? Oh! (*turns L. and drops on settee*) I—I'll not allow it.

(MILLICENT *crosses and stands above her, and ARCHIE below her; they try to pacify her, as she chokingly gasps out*)

It's preposterous. I'll not suffer it. Go and fetch Anthony down, Archie. I'll never give my consent, I'll—— Oh, such barefaced, underhand——

MILLICENT. (*trying to pacify her*) Mother,—please.

ARCHIE. Yes, dash it all, Charlotte, do keep hold of yourself.

MRS. O'MARA. (*good-naturedly*) Aw, don't mind me now, Major. Ut'll be a bit of a surprise, ut was to me, meself, indeed. I know just how she'll be feelin'. (*to LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Ye'd best do as I did yesterday, Lady Crackenthorpe, just go up-stairs, an' take off yer corsets, an' have a good cry.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*indignantly*) Oh-h-h!

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, ye'd better now. Ut's no use bottlin' it up,—a tear now an' then, never does annybody anny good. Just settle down to ut, and cry ut out av yer system, and ye'll find ye'll laugh, at ut all, in the mornin'.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*furiously*) Laugh at it? (*starting up*) Archie, I—I won't suffer this—this impertinence.

ARCHIE. (*protesting*) Here, that'll do, Charlotte—

MRS. O'MARA. (*easily*) Aw, don't worry, Major, av course she'll be after callin' it "impertinence." Ut's what people always call good advice, when they know ut's true, and won't admit it.

(*The dressing-gong is heard.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*rising*) Oh-h-h! (*she crosses R. to staircase, haughtily*) I'm going, Millicent (*walks up staircase stiffly*)

(MILLICENT *lingers and looks doubtfully from her mother to* MRS. O'MARA.)

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, go with yer mother, now, Miss Millicent. (*without looking at* LADY CRACKENTHORPE, *but loud enough for her to hear*) I've been in the wrong meself, an' I know just how she'll be feelin'.

(LADY CRACKENTHORPE *sweeps through archway on landing, R., with her head in the air, and* MILLICENT *runs up staircase and exits after her.*)

ARCHIE. (*feeling awkward, looking at his watch*)
Hullo, by Jove, time I was changin' too, so, if you'll
excuse me—— (*turns and mounts the stairs, after*
MILLICENT)

MRS. O'MARA. (*Watching them all depart one after
the other, as ARCHIE disappears through archway, R.*)
Sure, an' I think I'll be joining the procession, too.

(*She picks up her skirts and is about to mount the stairs,
when PEGGY enters through archway on landing L.
She has changed into a pretty evening gown. PEGGY
runs across landing, runs down to her mother.*)

MRS. O'MARA. I was just coming back, Peggy dar-
lin' (*looking at her*) Why, ye've changed already!

PEGGY. Well, so would you, if you'd never had
your frock off for forty-eight hours. I got to hate
the very sight of it. I felt as though I'd been born in
it. Hsh!

(*A motor horn is heard tooting off in the distance and
PEGGY turns to her mother, excitedly.*)

Mother! That's Jack Menzies's motor, I'm sure it
is. (*PEGGY runs to window, looks out, and turns*)
Mother!—He's brought Jimmy.

MRS. O'MARA. Thank goodness! Now ye can get
it over, before he sees anybody.

PEGGY. (*startled*) Get it over?

MRS. O'MARA. Yes, put it to him and settle it,
while they're all dressin' for dinner, an' then we'll
know where we are.

PEGGY. (*getting flurried*) Good gracious! But I didn't expect to have to do it as soon as this. I begin to feel horribly nervous. I'd no idea proposing was such "jumpy" work. I don't wonder men "shy" at it. Oh! he's here!

(*She sits down hastily, and ducks her head over microscope, and MRS. O'MARA hurries up the staircase. (The folding doors are flung open, and JIMMY enters hurriedly, wearing overcoat and cap.)*

JIMMY. (*looking round and seeing PEGGY*) Ah! You are here! That's all right. (*he turns and runs out through folding doors again, and his voice is heard off*) It's all right, Jack, she's here, all safe. Good-night.

(*There is a tooting of a motor heard off.*)

PEGGY. (*looking at herself, and patting and straightening herself and her frock, feverishly*) Wait a bit, mother. I know I shall make an awful muddle of it. Does my hair look all right? (*touching it hurriedly*) Oh, I'm perfectly certain I look horrid.

MRS. O'MARA. (*speaking down from balcony*) Then go on lookin' horrid. It suits ye. (*PEGGY smiles*) Only smile at him like *that*, an'——

PEGGY. (*starting*) Oh! I was forgetting. I mustn't smile at all. I must look frigid. Hsh, he's coming back.

(*She ducks her head down over microscope, hastily, and MRS. O'MARA exits from balcony entrance, L.*)

(*Re-enter JIMMY.*)

JIMMY. (*glancing round*) Oh, you're alone? That's all right. Why did you rush off from my rooms like that? I hope to goodness you haven't told them, here?

PEGGY. (*looking down microscope, without looking at him*) I've told—mother.

JIMMY. (*leaning over her table, anxiously*) Yes, yes—of course, but the others?

PEGGY. (*without looking up*) No one else knows—yet.

JIMMY. (*relieved*) That's all right. (*taking off overcoat and going up with it to table at back*) But your mother knows as much as I do,—eh?

PEGGY. (*demurely*) Oh yes,—(*with a sudden wicked smile*)—more!

JIMMY. (*coming down, a little behind, and to L. of her*) Well, did she think you ought to own up, and give yourself away?

PEGGY. (*concealing her amusement*) Well no, that is—not just at present.

JIMMY. I knew she wouldn't. In fact, she wouldn't let you tell the truth.

PEGGY. (*demurely*) Well, that was what she said, certainly. (*she takes another mischievous peep at him as he turns away*)

JIMMY. (*crossing L. to fireplace, and looking into it, with his back to her*) Then, I suppose there's nothing for it but—silence, and Ceylon.

PEGGY. (*chuckling silently behind him and then assuming her haughtiest tone*) I don't understand you. I thought I'd made it quite clear by my message through Mr. Menzies, that I'd given up that idea. I couldn't dream of allowing you to throw up this offer of his on my account.

JIMMY. (*still looking into fire, with his back to her*) Oh, you mustn't consider me, you must think of yourself.

PEGGY. (*smiling behind him*) Oh, I am doing.

JIMMY. (*turning sharply*) Eh—how? (PEGGY “*ducks*” quickly over microscope)

JIMMY. (*crossing quickly and impatiently pushing microscope aside—irritably*) Oh, do let that wretched thing alone, and listen to me. (*leaning across table*) How?—What do you mean?

PEGGY. (*finding he is getting awkwardly near, brushes past him, and coming down below chair, and standing in front of table, with her back to him again*) I mean, I couldn't dream of accepting such a sacrifice from any man,—not even from my greatest enemy.

JIMMY. (*wincing a little, and standing where she left him, behind her*) I'm surprised you don't think it right that your “greatest enemy” should suffer.

PEGGY. (*smiling wickedly—face to audience*) Oh, I hope I'm not quite devoid of fairness and generosity.

JIMMY. (*shrugging his shoulders, and crossing behind table towards R.*) Well, then, seeing you've gone back on that scheme, too, what are you going to do?

PEGGY. (*beginning to get nervous*) Well, as it's

all my fault, I suppose I must suffer for it, so, whether I like it or not, it seems I must fall back on—on—(*sticks and hesitates*)—on—the other alternative.

JIMMY. (*stopping dead, R. C., and looking down at her*) What—the truth?

PEGGY. No, no, I mean—(*gets very confused and sitting by table*)—the—the other alternative.

JIMMY. (*starting violently and coming rapidly down R., on a line with PEGGY*) What? . . . Peggy!! You can't mean you'll agree to marry me?

PEGGY. (*stiffly*) It seems inevitable.

JIMMY. (*his face lighting up*) Then you have found out your mistake? You do believe me? You own that you've been awfully rough on me? (*triumphantly*) I knew you'd see that you were wrong.

PEGGY. (*instantly firing up at this, starting up and facing him*) I see nothing of the kind. I haven't changed my opinion with regard to you—(*hastily correcting herself*)—er—with regard to your horrid conduct, in the very least.

JIMMY. And yet you're willing to marry me?

PEGGY. (*stiffly*) It seems the only way of preventing other people from suffering for my stupid blunder. I must be the one to suffer, it's not a matter of choice, (*loftily*) I—I feel it is my duty to do this,—whatever it may cost me.

(JIMMY looks at her for a moment in dead silence without moving, and PEGGY stares in front of her with assumed coldness.)

JIMMY. (*quietly*) I hope you won't think me ungracious, but I'm afraid I can't agree to such a thing. (*he turns R., and goes up stage*)

PEGGY. (*wheeling round*) What? (*stares at him incredulously*) You can't agree to it?

JIMMY. No. After what you've said I should be a cad if I took advantage of such an offer. You can't realize what it means.

PEGGY. (*choking with indignation*) You—actually—refuse?

JIMMY. I feel bound to.

PEGGY. (*with an angry cry*) Oh-h-h! (*she sits,—with her back to him*)

JIMMY. I feel it's only fair to *you*.

PEGGY. (*with a savage laugh*) "To me!" Ha, ha! Oh, you might as well be honest about it.

JIMMY. (*coming down L.*) I don't understand you. All I mean is, that my losing a good billet, and having to go back to Ceylon, is child's play to deliberately tying oneself up for life to the wrong person.

PEGGY. (*furiously*) Oh, so *that's* how you regard it?

JIMMY. Of course, and it's how *you* would regard it, afterwards, from what you say. (*he crosses to extreme R.*)

(*Enter R., through archway at head of staircase, LADY CRACKENTHORPE in a handsome evening gown, followed almost immediately by MAJOR ARCHIE PHIPPS, also in evening dress.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*as she comes downstairs*) Oh, so you've come, Jimmy? I must say I think you might have—— (*seeing PEGGY*) Oh, you're here, too; Millicent told me you'd come. (*to JIMMY*) Well, what have you done since we saw you?

(*Coming down R. C., above table.*)

JIMMY. Nothing.

ARCHIE. (*down R.*) Eh—what? D'ye mean things are just where they were?

JIMMY. (*shortly*) At present.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. But we must know what to say to people. This affair must be settled one way or the other.

PEGGY. (*decidedly*) It is settled. (*she turns and walks between LADY CRACKENTHORPE and ARCHIE to stairs and begins to ascend; they all turn and watch her*)

ARCHIE. (*calling after her*) Eh—what? You don't mean you've agreed to marry Jimmy, after all?

PEGGY. (*pausing on landing, and looking over banisters, and speaking with biting sarcasm*) Oh yes, I've agreed, but—Jimmy prefers to go back to Ceylon.

(*She turns and walks through archway L., with her head in the air, angrily.*)

JIMMY. (*standing thunderstruck for a minute and then springing towards stairs*) What? . . . Stop! . . . Peggy!

(*A door bangs sharply beyond archway on landing off, and JIMMY turns back from stairs, looking annoyed and baffled.*)

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*to JIMMY*) What does she mean? Of course you're not going back to Ceylon, *now*.

ARCHIE. No, dash it all, you'll never be fool enough after waitin' so long for this berth, to chuck it up, now you've got it.

JIMMY. I shall do as I please, it's no affair of yours.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. But it is of *mine*. What's to become of *me*?

ARCHIE. Yes, dash it all, my dear feller, you mustn't forget *us*,—(*hastily correcting himself*)—I mean,—your mother.

JIMMY. (*looking at them in surprise*) Why, how on earth can it affect either of you?

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. Well, you must see I can't live here, when once that woman is Anthony's wife.

ARCHIE. (*agitatedly*) Of course not, so where the dooce are we to—I mean, where is she to go? You see, we—I mean your mother—has been lookin' to you as—well—as——

JIMMY. A haven of refuge, what? (*grimly*) H'm, the family red herring is getting on.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. This is no laughing matter, Jimmy. You simply *cannot* go back to Ceylon, and desert me, just to stop people's tongues. If you won't marry this girl, the whole story must be contradicted at once. I, myself, will write to the *Morning Post*, and——

JIMMY. (*sharply*) You'll do nothing of the kind.

If you move one step in this affair, you needn't look to *me* for a "haven of refuge."

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. But if you go back to Ceylon——

JIMMY. (*significantly*) I haven't gone yet.

(MRS. O'MARA'S voice is heard off from landing.)

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, let's give the spiders a holiday till to-morrow, Anthony darlin'; ut's quite hungry I am, with excitement.

JIMMY. (*quietly to LADY CRACKENTHORPE*) Here comes your daughter-in-law, mater, and please be good enough to treat her as one.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. I shall treat her as I choose.

JIMMY. (*quietly*) Don't forget the "haven of refuge," mater. You've had your innings, and now I'm going to see that the other side gets fair play.

(MRS. O'MARA and ANTHONY appear on landing, both in evening dress.)

ANTHONY. (*as he comes down*) Oh, is that Jimmy?

JIMMY. (*going to meet him*) Yes, I congratulate you, old chap. We all do, Mrs. O'Mara, and I'm going to take the privilege of a future brother-in-law—— (*approaches to kiss her*).

MRS. O'MARA. Brother-in-law, is ut ye call yer-self, after runnin' away with me only child? Sure, I wonder ye like to look me in the face.

JIMMY. I like it so much, that I feel I must——
(*kisses her*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*with a playful push*) Aw, get along wid ye, and save those for Peggy.

ANTHONY. (*frowning at JIMMY*) Exactly. That is precisely what I was about to suggest.

(*The dinner gong sounds off R., and PARKER enters and opens door up R.*)

ANTHONY. Ah, dinner! (*offers his arm to MRS. O'MARA*) Shall we——?

MRS. O'MARA. No, Anthony, I want ye to give yer arm to—mother!

(*LADY CRACKENTHORPE turns with an angry expression and is about to speak, when JIMMY coughs warningly, whereupon she remains silent; ANTHONY approaches her and sheepishly offers his arm.*)

JIMMY. (*quietly*) You'd better lead off with Anthony, mater. It'll save trouble, now.

LADY CRACKENTHORPE. (*glancing at JIMMY and changing her expression and saying quite meekly*) Oh, very well, Anthony.

ANTHONY. (*as he leads LADY CRACKENTHORPE up stage*) We're quite a family party to-night, mother, eh? When you think that I'm Jimmy's future father-in-law, and Kitty, sister-in-law to her own daughter, well—(*laughs*)—we certainly are quite a family party.

(*They go up stage and off through door R.*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*to JIMMY*) Where's Peggy?

JIMMY. *I'll wait for her. Uncle Archie will take you in.*

ARCHIE. Eh—what? (*catches JIMMY's eye fixed on him, and says hastily*) Oh, by Jove! Ya-as, delighted. May I, Mrs. O'Mara? (*offering his arm*)

MRS. O'MARA. (*smiling at him as she takes his arm*) Sure, me name's just Kitty to me relations.

ARCHIE. (*pulling his moustache, fixing eyeglass and forcing a laugh*) Haw, haw! Ya-as, by Jove! I keep forgettin' we're goin' to be—relations.

MRS. O'MARA. Aw, but ye must remember that, an' we'll forget everything else just—(*she smiles at him*)—"for the good o' the fam'ly."

ARCHIE. (*forcing another laugh*) Haw, haw!

(*They go up and off through door R.*)

JIMMY. (*to MILLICENT*) Don't you wait for me, Milly. I mayn't come in at all. I'm off to town by the nine train, and I must see Peggy first.

MILLICENT. Oh, all right. (*turns to go, and then turns back impulsively and kisses JIMMY*) Good luck, Jimmy.

JIMMY. Thanks, old girl. Cut in.

(*MILLICENT follows the others through door R., which she closes after her.*)

(*JIMMY left alone, looks up staircase, listens, looks at watch and then walks c. He stands thinking, then lights a cigarette and walks up stage still thinking, and pushes open window under landing, and leans out*

smoking. Re-enter PEGGY, on landing, in hat and long coat, carrying letter in her hand. She peeps over banister, but can't see JIMMY, who is exactly beneath her, under the landing. She then runs lightly down the stairs, and at door stoops to gather up her train, and in doing so she drops her letter)

PEGGY. *(to herself as she drops letter)* Oh, bother !

(JIMMY turns and sees her, and comes forward.)

JIMMY. *(looking at her hat and coat)* Peggy !

PEGGY. *(startled and confused)* I—I thought you were in at dinner. I sent the maid to tell you all not to wait.

JIMMY. Oh well, she didn't tell us, and I did wait, you see, and so I'm just in time to stop you.

PEGGY. Stop me ?

JIMMY. *(impatiently)* Oh, it's plain enough what you were going to do. This is sheer folly, Peggy. To bolt in the daytime was mad enough, but to——

PEGGY. *(with a mocking laugh)* Ha, ha ! Did you actually flatter yourself that I was running away ? Ha, ha, ha ! Oh no ! I've had quite enough running away, thank you.

JIMMY. *(pointing)* Then why the hat and coat ?

PEGGY. I was going to post a letter, that's all. *(stoops to pick up letter)*

JIMMY. Let me. *(stoops quickly and picks up letter for her, and as he holds it out his eyes catch the address. He draws it back and looks at it and reads)*

“The *Morning Post*!” (*looking up at her*) Why are you writing to the *Morning Post*?

PEGGY. (*looking at him straight in the eyes*) I’m writing to contradict the absurd report that I’m married to you. (*holding out her hand*) Give it me, please.

JIMMY. (*quietly*) Just a moment. Why are you doing this?

PEGGY. That’s my business.

JIMMY. Not if I am the cause of it. You never thought of writing this half an hour ago, or you wouldn’t have offered to marry me, so I must be the cause of it, and I won’t let you do it. (*holding up letter*) What earthly good can this do to anybody?

PEGGY. I’m determined to tell the truth, and wash my hands of the whole affair, and then (*bitingly*) it won’t be necessary for you to go back to Ceylon, to avoid *marrying me*.

JIMMY. You know that was not my reason for going back.

PEGGY. I don’t know anything of the kind. I only know that you’ve behaved abominably, and I’ll never—*never* forgive you; but I’m not going to have it on my conscience that I was the means of driving you back there. So—so, give me my letter, please.

JIMMY. Wait a bit.

PEGGY. (*holding out her hand*) I can’t wait. It must go to-night.

JIMMY. (*quietly*) I think not.

PEGGY. (*beginning to lose her temper*) It's not the least use talking,—I'm determined.

JIMMY. So am I. (*he tears the letter in two*)

PEGGY. (*with an angry gasp, backing a little L.*) Oh! How dare you treat my letter like that?

JIMMY. I'm not likely to stick at trifles, when it's got to this. (*he tears it again*)

PEGGY. Oh, very well. I shall only write another letter, that's all.

(*She turns to cross up to writing-table, but JIMMY stops her near head of settee.*)

JIMMY. Stop! (*PEGGY stops and looks at him*) Suppose I were to tell you, that, when I came here to-night, I never intended to go back to Ceylon.

PEGGY. (*staring at him, with startled eyes*) You never intended to—— (*turning from him L., incredulously*) Oh, I'll not believe such a thing.

JIMMY. (*quietly*) It's a fact. Look here. (*takes a paper from his breast pocket and holds it out to her*) No, take it—look at it.

PEGGY. (*slowly takes paper, opens it, glances at it, and looks puzzled*) A special licence! My name——? (*she looks up astonished*)

JIMMY. Yes. That was what I intended to do, when I came here to-night. (*PEGGY stares at him bewildered*) But when you offered to marry me, you showed so plainly how you hated the idea of such a thing, that I saw I'd been mistaken, and so I left that licence where it was. (*tapping his pocket*)

PEGGY. (*her temper rising, holding out the licence*) But—but how *dare* you go and get this, and have my name put on, when I'd already refused you?

JIMMY. (*interrupting*) It was after Jack Menzies gave me your message. I thought if you were willing to run your head into such a hornet's nest for my sake, that you *must* care for me. So I went out and got that licence.

PEGGY. (*getting more angry every minute*) Then you've simply been making a fool of me *again*?

JIMMY. (*surprised*) No!

PEGGY. (*furiously*) Yes, you *have*. You stood there, and let me offer to marry you, and actually humiliated me by daring to refuse me, and you had this (*holding out licence*) in your pocket all the time. (*choking with anger*) Oh-h-h! (*she viciously tears the licence in pieces and throws them on floor in front of her, then faces him*) There!

JIMMY (*quietly, speaking with an effort*) Then that settles it. I *do* go back to Ceylon,—to-morrow. (*goes up to writing-table and picks up hat and coat*)

PEGGY. (*down L., face to audience, her voice trembling a little*) You—you'll please to understand that I'm going to write that letter to the *Morning Post*.

JIMMY. (*standing C., behind her, his coat on his arm*) Oh no, you're not. You won't kick a man when he's down. I've been a fool. I've made a hash of things. You say I've behaved badly to you, well, if I have, you can't refuse—in common fairness—to let me try to wipe it out.

PEGGY. (*still facing audience*) I won't let you lose——

JIMMY. (*wearily*) Oh, what does it matter what I lose, and where I have to go, so long as I have to lose you? (*comes down and stands just behind her right shoulder, speaks gently from there*) Peggy, I know that it doesn't matter to you, but I never did lie to you. I loved you as much on that first day we met, as I love you this minute.

PEGGY. (*turning swiftly and looking at him, with a startled cry of amazement*) What?

JIMMY. (*shrugging his shoulders, wearily*) Oh, I know you don't believe me, but it's true;—so let me feel I've done *something* for you.—Don't write that letter. Promise me.

PEGGY. (*looking away from him again, her voice shaking*) You—you're quite sure you're not—pretending?

JIMMY. No, I'm going,—now. (*turns up stage towards door at back, when she speaks*)

PEGGY. (*her face suddenly breaking into a smile as she brushes some tears from her eyes, and gasps, with a choke*) Wait, don't be—so sudden.

(JIMMY turns and looks back at her.)

You're quite sure you're not—pretending?

JIMMY. Can't you believe me yet?

PEGGY. (*in a low voice*) I—I want to, so—(*with a sudden smile and a little choke in her voice*)—if you're *ab-so-lutely* sure you're not pretending, let's pretend

that we've *both* been pretending all the time, and—
and——

JIMMY. (*throwing coat and cap on nearest chair and coming down to her, breathlessly*) What—what?

PEGGY. (*suddenly dropping on to her knees by the pieces of the torn licence, and looking up at him sideways*) Try to stick this licence together again. We—we may want it.

JIMMY. (*springing forward and dropping on his knees beside her*) Peggy! You can't mean you've changed?

PEGGY. (*nodding*) Yes, it began this afternoon. (*picking up pieces of licence.*)

JIMMY. You really began to—to *care* for me?

PEGGY. (*softly*) Yes.

JIMMY. When?

PEGGY. (*half smiling, half crying*) All of a sudden.

'He kisses her—both of them still on their knees.)

CURTAIN.



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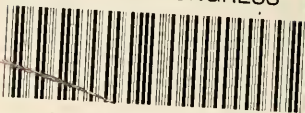
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